
デスマーチからはじまる異世界狂想曲
3
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Credits


DM3
Characters of Deathmarch
ナナ
サトゥー
リザ
ルル
アリサ
ミーア
タマ
ポチ


「こっちはちっちゃなポチ～？」
「ちっちゃいタマなのです」
「ふわふわで丸くて、そう、可愛いのです」
「うさぎ」

Part 1 - I Want to Practice Magic [Failure Arc]

Satou's here. My karaoke points has never been higher than 60. Yearning for that thing called absolute pitch, Satou's.

◇

I'm hearing singing birds signaling morning.
Opening my eyes, I see faint light from the cloth roof. It's a bit dazzling.
Ah right, I slept in the wagon because the camping ground was wasteland covered with stones yesterday.

While lying down I look down to my chest, and see a hand grasping my shirt loose. I look to the side, a beautiful black-haired girl is sleeping there while hugging my left hand.
I've gotten quite accustomed to it but it makes my heart jump for a bit. If there's no age difference between us, I wouldn't be able to retain my reason.
Next I turn my view toward the opposite side.
There, a girl whose head is being pressed by two gigantic pair of hills is sleeping with unpleasant expression, and the owner of the hills herself is hugging my arm while having innocent sleeping expression on her truly beautiful face.

Since it'd be too bad to wake everyone up, I doze off while enjoying the soft and nice fragrance of women.
I peek at the wide neckline of Nana's pajamas, locking on soft-looking valley is a man's nature. Since I use all my might to suppress the natural phenomenon that happens to man every morning, I'd like you to forgive me doing this much.

"Master, the breakfast preparation is about to complete, so please get up."

Liza who had been on guard duty for until dawn comes to wake me up. Her voice sounds a bit flat, it must be my imagination.
I almost say, "I'm sorry", out of guilt, but somehow I reply back with a good morning.

Lulu and Mia are waking up after hearing the voice.
Lulu is saying good morning while shyly fixes her hair and clothes, and Mia shortly says, "Morning" in a small voice while cruelly shoving Nana who had been hugging her aside.
After greeting Lulu, I hand out a white apron to Liza out of the wagon. Nana doesn't seem like she'll wake up even after getting cruelly shoved.

When I look at my feet, Arisa is asleep while grabbing the cuff of my trousers and on top of her, Pochi and Tama are sleeping while looking like they're holding her down.
I can somehow imagine what happened. Arisa was going to do yobai and tried to move Pochi and Tama out of the way, they counterattacked and they were exhausted halfway through. And then Lulu gained profit from all of these.

Hearing rustling clothes, I turn toward it, and Mia is there with her clothes already taken off.

"Wipe me."

Mia gives me towel and makes me wipe her back. It seems that she's sweaty because Nana hugged her all night.
After being saved from the magician, Mia sometimes becomes dependent like this.
It's not like she's fallen for me, it feels more like a sibling love.

"Mia, don't thoughtlessly undress yourself in front of an opposite sex."
"N."

She's answering briefly while nodding, does she really understand?
Her character would probably get mended when she's old enough even if I leave her alone, so I won't fuss over it too much. It's fine just to remind her occasionally.

Since I've finished wiping her back, I'm giving the towel to Mia. Mia reverses her direction and spread her arms wide assuming, 'wipe me', posture.
She's wearing an underwear of course, but only her long hair covers her upper body.

"Here too."
"Mia, wipe the front yourself."
"...Satou."
"I won't do it even if you act spoiled."

She demands with upturned eyes, but more than this is dangerous. Even if she's flat, I'm afraid that I'd caught little girl preference (curse).
Mia reluctantly receives the towel and begins to wipe her front.
Since it feels indecent if I look at it too much, I wake Nana and the girls up and get out of the wagon.

◇

The outside of the wagon smells of blood---

On a tree near where Liza is cooking, there are 5 animal bodies hung on a rope in order to drain their bloods.
The AR indicates that it's [Brown Wolf Meat]. Come to think of it, they were eliminated by Pochi and Tama at midnight. Since there were just 10 low leveled animals, I just watched over them on the radar. So half of it became, "Meat", huh.

Looking at this state, it means that the breakfast is going to be meat. I do like meat, but I'd love if it's not that from the morning.

"It's going to be done soon, so please drink this for now."

Lulu says so while serving me tea.
Since she's only wearing a simple apron over her pajamas, her body lines visible under the morning light before my eyes, I'm a bit troubled to where I look.

"We have prepared vegetable soup and breads for master and Mia, so please don't worry."
"Thank you, I appreciate it."

If I leave it to Liza alone, it'd certainly become a meat fest, so I'm happy with Lulu's concern.
Mia has somehow quietly sat down beside me before I was aware, snatches the cup from my hand and drinks the tea.

There are usually three little girls scrambling around me, but it's different in the morning. They're going to Liza's, asking to help while tasting this and that, and getting scolded. It reminds me of the nostalgic time when I was a hungry child.

"Master, 'ning."
"Good morning Nana. Morning greeting is [Good morning] you know. Forget strange things Arisa taught you."
"Yes, my lord."

I look up Nana who answered while saluting. Seen this close, her face is hidden by her breasts looked up. Truly a splendid view.
While I'm correcting the strange words that Arisa taught her, we sit on the sheet.
Since the clothes that she wore looked like what a cheap courtesan would wear, right now she's wearing Liza's reserve clothes. At first I wanted to lend her my robe but for some reason Arisa was strongly against it and Lulu also weakly opposed it, so it was rejected.

On the large platter are wolf intestines with fried vegetables and boiled potatoes, vegetable soup for breakfast it is today. There are cut bread and fruits made for me and Mia.

With Liza's instruction, the three little girls are quickly distributing plates and tablewares. Of course they also don't forget to encamp near the platter with meat.
The battle begins after everyone had sit down and said, "*Itadakimasu*". With Liza as the chief, Pochi, Tama and Arisa aim at the meat platter. Although it has fried vegetables, around 70% of it is meat, and it's disappearing fast. Around 3-4 kilos of meat are eaten up in a blink of eyes, it feels like watching a fast forwarded video.
On the other hand, Lulu is putting meat together with vegetable on her mouth in good manner. She's eating calmly, but her hands aren't stopping so her appetite is probably plentiful enough.

It's nice to be young~. They could eat so much meat since morning. I feel like having heartburn even just by looking at it.

Nana drinks water while watching them.
I'll say this beforehand, this isn't a bullying.

It's said that for approximately half a year after her birth, she can only receive water and magic power. Since the same things is also written in the alchemy book left behind by Trazayuya-shi, it's probably true.

There three ways to supply magic to Nana.

The first is by using a facility called Regulation Tank. When she was with Zen the magician, she used this method.

The second is by doing naughty thing with a man. The so-called bed technique. Frankly speaking, it's sexual intercourse. I was fine with this method, but Lulu suddenly cried, "I'm first!", so I stopped. Her crimson red figure afterwards was quite cute. Of course, Arisa also objected but since it was completely overshadowed by Lulu's impact, there isn't any impression left. It seems that it was a verbal slip, she couldn't look me in the eyes for 2 days after that.

The third and the last is by placing hands near her heart and pouring magic power to her heart which operates like a magic tool. To have a justified reason to touch that splendid hills, I have no complaint--- but, when I'm about to do it, Mia blocks it with a single word.

"Back."

Yes, as long as it's near the heart, it's fine to do it from the back.
Well fine, I'm still enjoying her fascinating nape and the lines of her bare shoulders from the back. Just once, yes, just once is enough, let me do something as I please.

◇

After the meal, I'm supplying magic power to Nana who has her back exposed.
When I strengthen the magic supply, she react ticklishly, it's interesting.
Although, Arisa and the girls are staring here like they're monitoring, so I can't play around. Even though the charming voice of a beautiful woman would warmth my heart, this is too bad.

"Are you going to practice again today?"
"Of course."

Let me say this, it's just a magic practice. It's nothing that would make me feel guilty.
Not only me, Pochi and Tama are also holding short canes. They wanted to imitate me when they see me practicing magic, so I lent them the canes.

"Then I'll give you an example. I will only do it once, so watch it well."

Arisa with a long cane faces toward where there's no one and starts to chant.

"■■■ Breeze"

After the chant is complete, gentle winds shake the weeds.

"Uuu, my head hurts. The burden of using magic without the skill is big after all. It might be using five times more magic power even."

I thank Arisa and begin to chant the magic.
It's a magic with the shortest chant among the life magic and high success rate.

"■▼▲ Breeze"

Like usual, I failed.

"Not good, it's not good at all. Only the first node of the beginning was right. Moreover the rhythm was strange."

Rhythm huh, I'm not confident with that.
First let's do something about the fumble.

"Nyrurireato saru mina ra me ra to oi yoi oi wan"
"Nyururiareto saru ra mina metora oi yoi io nyan"

Pochi and Tama facing each other, are reciting random chants while waving the canes around like dancing.
Of course it doesn't work, but I won't say anything unnecessary since the two looks really happy.

"■◆▲ Breeze"
"■▲◆ Breeze"
"▲▲◆ Breeze"
"No good, it's getting weirder."

I tried for so many times but Arisa keep disapproving it.

"Let's change the approach."
"Like how?"
"Let's see, do it calmly, first why don't you make sure that you get the pronunciation right?"

That reminds me, I've bought books about reciting and pronunciation too.
While reading the book, the practice begins.

When I start practicing tongue-twister, Arisa who was looking at Pochi and Tama's dance interjects.

"Try saying 'kami anime' 5 times fast."
"Kami anime, kami amime, kami ami i, I can't."

What the heck is this. It's difficult.

"Next is, try to pronounce the vowels, 『a』 and 『i』 clearly."

Fumu, I think I had heard the same thing from seiyuu who act as BGM from the net radio when I was on break in the rest area during my job.

Let's try this.

"Slowly okay."
"Kami anime, kami anime, kami anime, kami anime, kami amime."

"Too bad, only the last one was out, once more! Come, stand up, if you're like that then the lowest seat of celestial maiden is but a dream!"

Arisa is hiding half her face with hair while saying that.
For now, let's challenge it once again.

"Kami anime, kami anime, kami anime, kami anime, kami anime."

>[Tongue-twister Skill Acquired]
>[Smooth Talking Skill Acquired]

Alright, I max out the point for both and activate them.
The me now is able to utter any kind of tongue-twister.

"■◆◆ Breeze"

...I failed.

"You didn't bite your tongue, but your rhythm is wrong."

I tried to practice with Arisa's help for many times, but the chanting never succeed. I have no sense of pitch. I wonder how often did I bicker with sound creators for not recognizing the sound difference during bug report...

Liza is calling since the preparation for departure is complete, so I finish the magic practice.

Unfortunately I can't practice on the wagon.
I almost bite my tongue, and my voice vibrates from the shaking, so practice isn't possible.
I make a promise in my heart to do my best tomorrow, and go on the coachman stand.
I pat Pochi and Tama's head who positioned themselves on both sides of me and depart the wagon.

Part 2 - Let's Train

Satou's here. Some people said that making cakes are like doing chemistry experiment.

I think that's a big fat lie, I think people who make confectionery have had good tastes from the beginning.

◇

Now then, for several days in this trip, let's activate numerous skills. I wouldn't use up half of my points even if I maximize out all the skills that I've obtained, but since skill like [Appraisal] encompass several other skills in function, I'll exclude skills with questionable or redundant effect.

First, I had wanted to level up Weapon skills, but I already acquired enough skills needed for close combat, so I'll put the other weapon skills to reserve. For once, since I've read useful appliance for Dagger skill from many history and tales, I activate it.

I enable almost all Physical combat-related skills. Since the demerit from [Reckless Courage] skill seems to be high, I leave it inactive. I don't know the usability of Shield Bash so I only level it up to 5. If it's useful then I'll maximize it.

Tactic skills are another ones where I don't feel the actual effects, but I activate them all following Arisa's advise.
I'm told that if I combine commands and cooperations together, the party members could then use combo techniques. Seems that this is an information from the hero yet Arisa herself doesn't know how to concretely do it, oioi you have to verify that.
Although she says, "When we level up in the labyrinth, we'll learn it.", when I consult to her, it doesn't seem like they'll be able to do it right away.

I've already activated most physical-related skills already so I just activate the remaining, Herculean Strength skill.
Although I'm already strong enough to play with a lump of iron like it's clay, so I don't feel stronger. Let's just believe that it'll make a difference when I fight a solid enemy.

The Magic skills branch underwent no change at all. There's no meaning to it until I can successfully chant.

I also think that Resistance skills have subtle effects, but I activate them just to be safe. However, I only level up [Fear Resistance] skill to level 3. This is only a hunch, but I feel that I shouldn't maximize it. It has the same kind of smell as [Reckless Courage] skill.

I level up Production skills, [Carpenter], [Leather Craft],[Weapon Creation], and [Blacksmith] to level 4. Leaving me better than the averages, but not quite an expert. Since I'm scared if I was to drink half-finished medicines, I raise the related skill to the maximum. With these levels of skills, it should be enough for repairing or making things in daily life.

I level up Science skills, [Experiment], [Appraisal] and [Education] to the max,、and [Demon Language], [Ash Rat Tribe Language] and [Green Scales Tribe Language] to level 1, beside those I don't make any other change since they look subtle.

I don't do anything with art-related skills. Confirming it with Arisa, singing skill doesn't have anything to do with rhythm. It seems to be a skill that would make people deeply moved with the thing you're conveying with your singing. I can't understand that at all, but even if I argue I can't refute it.
I can't succeed with the chanting anyway, since I have nothing to lose, maybe I should try raising it?

I level up Commerce-related skills, [Poker Face], [Persuasion], [Bribing], and [Lip Service] to level 5-- expert levels.
I didn't have the chance to use [Bribing] skill in Seryuu city, but according to the travel journal I've bought, there are a lot of people who need bribes for smoothening things up at the towns ahead. That's troubling.

Labor skills are mostly unchanged. I maximize [Surveillance] and [Capture] skills, but only leave [Marshalling] skill to level 5.

For labyrinth skills, [Item Box] is unchanged, while [Trap Usage] get to level 5, but I raise all other skill to the maximum.
In this world, I don't think that I'd be unrelated to labyrinth after all.

The most troubling ones are Specialty skills. Skills that are certain to be useful like [Lip Reading] and [Straining One's Ear] are raised to the maximum, but I'm wondering whether to activate stuffs that are too dark like [Behind the Scene], or [Assassination], and decide to activate the ones that looks usable for scouting and fighting. I was at loss for a moment, but I decided to put aside, [Conspiracy], [Condemnation] and [False Charge].
Of course I leave the Night Time skills alone. It's no good to cheat there right?

Even after allocating this many, I haven't even use 30% of my skill points.
Since I'll need considerably more points when I can use magic, it's fine not to force myself to use skills like [Mowing] or [Transporting].

I also try to appraise the two unusable unique skills, but they're unknown like always. I'd like to have tutorial or help functions. Even though it was available in the original menu screen.

◇

After I've completed my skill activation work, what I should think next is how to learn skills that my companions have.

The skills they have that I don't are [Etiquette], [Thrusting], [Dismantling], [Heavy Blow], [Enemy Search], [Cooking], [Collecting], [Nature Art], and [Spirit Vision].

Among them, the [Nature Art] seems to be the same thing as Arisa's unique skill so even if I'm attacked by that technique, I won't learn it. According to the books left behind by

Trazayuya-shi, Homonculus have organs that enable them to use nature arts. It's probably something like a race-specific skill.

Mia's [Spirit Vision] seems to allow her to see spirit, but I can't even imagine how to acquire it so I give up on it. Of course, I asked Mia about it, but I only got these, "I can see it you know?", "You can't?", "Why?", kinds of answers. Let's ask from some adult elves on Bornean forest.

The skill that I need to learn most is probably [Enemy Search]. The map and radar are excellent for searching vast area and specific enemies, but they're not good for fuzzy ones. Even after setting it to look for the familiar like the other day, that kind of threat was still easily escaped from it.

The runner-up should be [Thrusting], and Heavy Blow]. Seems they would increase my attack power in combat.
The remaining ones are [Collecting], [Dismantling], [Cooking], but I don't need them with Liza and the others here. I feel that I don't have particular need for [Etiquette] skill, but looks like it could be used together with [Education] skill so let's plan to acquire it for now.

◇

I decide to learn [Dismantling] and [Cooking] from Liza on the next rest.

I've wanted to learn [Thrusting] and [Heavy Blow] first, but there's no enemy to fight. If I was to practice with Liza, I'm afraid that I would hurt her. Although she could be healed with medicine and Mia's magic, I still feel reluctant. I am also not able to learn the skill that I want most, [Enemy Search], since there is no enemy.

By the way, the wagon is about to leave Seryuu's earl territory and entering the neighboring earl's territory since yesterday. There are a lot of basins in this territory. Right now, the wagon is advancing on one such basin.
There are monsters in this territory, but there is absolutely none along the road, they only occasionally appear deep in the mountain. On the other hand, there are a lot of wolves' packs and hibernating bears. Since there seems to be a lot of beasts in the vicinity we are going tomorrow, I decide to have the combat training there.

Now then, let's put aside the planning for now and begin the dismantling.

Of course there's a reason why I want to learn dismantling now. It's because we've bought fish from the children on a village located near a river we've crossed earlier.
The hurdle of doing it with mammals are too high so when we got the fish I thought that it was a good chance to learn it. Since I've dissected fish before, it's probably going to be alright.

Sharp is better than dull. Thinking so, I take out a magic tool from the storage to use. [Troll Slayer], beside the attached property, it's a dagger without anything special except that it cuts well. Of course it cannot be compared to normal dagger although not to the degree of holy swords. It's carved with [RAZ] signature, I wonder if it's an inscription?

Following Liza's instruction, I cut through the fish without any resistance. I was able to cut it into 3 pieces in an instant.
After that, when I throw away the fish's intestines and head, the quite serious Liza scolds me.

>[Cooking Skill Acquired]
>[Dismantling Skill Acquired]
>[Dissection Skill Acquired]

I allocate points to maximum for dismantling and cooking skills and activate them. Since it's fish, let's grill them with salt and miso.

Since I don't have grill mesh or something alike in my Storage, I reluctantly use skewers made from trees and grill them with bonfire. When they begin to change color, I spread miso on it.
Everyone beside Mia and Nana are staring at me intently, so right when the grilled fish are done I distribute it to them.

"Yummy~""Delicious, nodesu."
"Delicious... It's been awhile since I've had fish, but this is more delicious than the one from my hometown by far."
"It's really delicious desu."
"DE-LI-SH~! rather, what's this, what's this, way too tasty."

They're quite popular.
Mia looks curious with them so I offer her a bite, but she says, "...don't want." with a slightly frustrated voice. Nana looks at me while looking like she really want to eat it, but I can't let her do that, so I endure it. Since her eyes have become teary, I'll fix her mood by dripping several drops of fruit juice for her cooled water.

I also eat it, but it's really too delicious.
I don't actually like river fish, but the flavor is the best. The savoriness overflows or rather, the oil enhances the taste of the white meat just right. I didn't think that the effect of level 10 cooking would be this much. I lament at the fact that there's no cooked rice. I do have 3 liters of rice, but I'm not sure how to heat it. I feel like I could make the best rice porridge, but I feel like I couldn't heat it right at all to make it fluffy.

Next I try sampling the taste of the fish with miso.
...It's tasty, but there's something different. It feels like there's something missing.
The miso fish is well received by everyone, but Arisa has the same impression as me.

"It's really delicious, but unlike the salted fish, there's something not right."

Even if your cooking skill level is high, it's no good if you don't know the recipe huh. I know somehow that the amount and method are perfect, and the miso usage is probably not wrong. I had wanted to make Sawara Miso Grill, but since I wasn't cooking much in the previous world, it might had been reckless of me.

I ask Arisa what I should do, but she says, "I know the taste isn't right, but I completely don't know how to do it right." with her hands on her hips while acting bossy in despair, is she feeling guilty or something?

Among the books that I've bought from the bookstore, there's no cooking books. I've completely overlooked it. Let's look for it in the next town.

◇

After dinner at the same day, I have Liza demonstrates [Thrusting] and [Heavy Blow]. I forwarded the plan because I saw a large beast approaching our camp site not so far away.

"Then, I will do a normal stab, a thrust, and a heavy blow in turns."

Liza says so, sets up a black spear and stabs three times with it. With beautiful stance, she's stabbing the spear more powerfully compared to some average territorial soldiers. I hear the sound of tearing air accompanying each stab. I don't quite understand the difference between the first two stabs, but the last one is clearly different.

Like a bowstring pulled to the limit, she twists her body back and then strongly lunge the spear forward. A single blow that reverberates with the whole body. It's similar to her single blow that pierced through the rhinoceros beetle monster in the labyrinth back then, but it's more polished by far.

Hmm? What was that just now.

"Liza, I'm sorry, but please do the last blow once again."
"Yes!"

She puts the stance like earlier and does the blow that shakes the ground. There really is a red trace-line coming out from her spear for an instant. Checking Liza's stat, not only her stamina has decreased, but her magic power too. It might be an additional effect of [Heavy Blow].

I decide to borrow Liza's spear and try to test it myself.

First let's warm up while using it normally.
Unfortunately, I don't produce powerful sounds like Liza does. It's probably because I'm being careful as not to gouge the ground, but it's lonely to not even make "Gou" or "Shun" sounds.

"Truly splendid stabs."

Liza is praising me, but since they're just stabs without power, I'm embarrassed with the excessive praise.
Next, I try to imitate thrusting. Something's not right.

"Master, please excuse me for a bit."

Is she unable to watch me twisting my wrist several times, Liza hugs me from behind and grasps the spear while explaining.

"To do thrusting, when master stab the spear, master has to half-rotate your wrist for an instant. Loosen master's hand for a moment and then grasp it tightly when master stabs. I will show it slowly, please feel the movement of my fingers and wrist."

Liza puts her hand on top of my hand and demonstrates the timing.
I see, this is something that's hard to transmit with just words.

Liza separates from me and I begin to do as demonstrated.
Yes, this is it.

"As expected of master for mastering the secret just by doing it once."
"It's because Liza is good at teaching."

The fact that Liza's teaching is good is the truth, but I could learn it just by doing once is unmistakably because of the spear skill level 10.
I do it several times until I memorize the feeling.
Still, even though I've become able to use it, I don't seem to get the skill. So it's true that in order to learn weapon skills I have to use it against an enemy.

The same thing happens with heavy blow. It goes without saying that I am not able to get the skill.
I wonder if it's because I don't have the skill, even though I can imitate heavy blow, my magic power isn't decreasing.

I want to quickly learn the skill and let out that red shines.
The blue light from holy swords is good, but I think that the red light really suits Liza.

Part 3 - Strengthening

Satou's here. There are a lot of RPG where you can create things nowadays.

If you fail, the materials disappear.

◇

On evening of that day, the "Guest" has came relatively close by as expected, so I get up off the bed and go to the place where Mia and Tama are doing night watch.

"Change?"
"Too early~?"
"The change is still a bit later."

I ask Tama to teach me the way to do [Enemy Search].

"Nyu~?"

She folds her short arms while looking troubled looking cute. I want to poke at the wrinkle on her forehead.

"Lots of sound, different sound."
"Same view, different color."
"Nice smell, normal smell, bad smell."
"Lots of sameness, lots of differences."
"So, you understand~?"

I listen attentively to her who's trying hard to convey.
The point is to detect the finer differences from numerous information. "Don't think, feel.", like that?

"I'll go inside the forest for a bit to try it. I'll raise my voice if anything happen, if you hear it then wake Liza up for help."

I tell the two so and make my way through the forest.
I've thought they would follow but it seems they're too sleepy for it.
I'm borrowing Liza's spear since I intend to acquire heavy blow skill when I come into the contact with the enemy. I've properly ask for permission before she went to sleep.

I've said to Tama that I would only go for a bit but the place is actually 3 kilometers away. It's around several hundred meters away from the enemy's location.

Basing from experience, I turn off all sort of indications OFF from the menu.
Next, I relax my body and sharpen my sense while musing over Tama's word.

While half-closing my eyes, I extend my focus.

Moonlight shines through the sparse shades. Ivies and bushes. Silhouette of sleeping birds at branches. Glowing eyes of small animals. Catching glimpse of a black shadow from the gaps between trees far away.

I listen carefully.

Lots of sounds. The sound of trees swaying from the winds. The sound of grasses stepped by small animals. Insects' sounds. The sound of claws of something hitting the hard ground.

I imagine every inch of my body uniting with nature.

The smell of grasses. The smell of soil. The faint smell of water. A different kind of creature's smell like paint dropped on a river.

My sense becomes quietly serene--

Kasa.

Ton.

Hyun.

I move my body matching the change on the flow of atmosphere. I had avoided something that attacked from a blind spot.

After avoiding it, I turn my consciousness toward the culprit, there's a black panther that has just landed slightly further away. That guy doesn't seem to think much of the failed surprise attack and gracefully turns toward me.

I make only the log be displayed.

>[Enemy Search Skill Acquired]
>[Danger Sensing Skill Acquired]
>[Space Grasp Skill Acquired]
>[Mind's Eye Skill Acquired]

I activate the abundance of new skills.
During that time, the black panther is attacking many times but since I can see it, avoiding isn't a problem.

I know that there's another one up on the tree, maybe it's thanks to enemy search skill.
Is it aiming for when I've became tired?

It's hard to use spear for close combat inside the woods but I could figure out the right angles thanks to space grasp skill and freely move as I imagine.
I prepare the heavy blow stance I've practiced this evening, and simultaneously drive heavy blow and thrusting to one of the animal. The quiet blow goes through the black panther's head without resistance.

>[Thrusting Skill Acquired]
>[Heavy Blow Skill Acquired]
>[Penetration Skill Acquired]

Matching the timing with my attack, the panther on the tree assaults me, I evade the danger as if I could see it.
I quickly activate the three new skills, and prepare to hit the panther that has just landed.
Since Liza seems to use magic when she demonstrates heavy blow, I try to put magic power into the spear.

The spear lets out red trace of light when it's feed with magic power.
Quite beautiful.

The spear pierces through the panther while drawing red track of light.
Immediately after the red light appears, I rotate my wrist in reverse rotation converging the spear tip on the panther, the panther's upper half and the tree behind it burst into small pieces.
It was good to do this away from the camp. I had almost disturbed everyone's sleep.

>[Magic Edge Skill Acquired]
>[Spiral Spear Attack Skill Acquired]

I didn't think there would be other techniques that could make red light appear like with Liza's technique. But I've acquired useful-looking skills so it's for the best. Of course, I also activate these two skills. The names are kinda chuunibyou-ish, but let's turn a blind eye on that.

◇

Since I've accidentally come into a wide open space suitable for practice, I decide to practice magic edge. The light seems to be different depending on the amount of magic power you put into.

I try putting 1 MP. Subtle light lines appear on the spear.
I try putting 10 MP. Clear red light lines appear on the spear.
I try putting 50 MP. Strong red light line repeatedly appear on the spear. This is usable for illumination.
I try putting 200 MP. Intense red light-- this is bad, the spear is vibrating strangely.

I have a feeling that the spear will explode if this is left alone.
Liza's sorrowful face flashes in my mind.

This is bad.

That's right.
If there's too much, then I can just absorb it.

The moment after I thought that, I extract the magic power on the spear by imagining

absorption-- good, the vibration has stopped.

Fuh, I was flustered.
Let's experiment with black steel spear or something next time.

Even though I've absorbed the magic, Liza's spear retain its red light or rather, it has become a pattern. Can't be helped, when the morning comes, I'll apologize to Liza by doing *dogeza*.

I hope that at least it doesn't get weaker...

Confirming with the AR, the spear's name has became, [Magic Spear Douma]. If I'm not mistaken it was [Black Spear of Cricket] back then. I don't remember its exact offensive power before, but it's certain that it has been strengthened. It was already a bit stronger than the black steel spear before but now it's near three times that. It still doesn't match the dragon spear in my storage, but it has become about as strong as the other magic spears.

This is what they call weapon reinforcement I guess.
Although, it was probably one step away from failure judging from that feel. If it fail, it's easy to imagine that Liza's spear would have broke.

When I look at the log, I've gained several skills.

>[Magic Manipulation Skill Acquired]

But I've been putting magic power into magic tool and Nana up to now....
I guess I have to not only insert but also absorb to meet the requirement.

>[Magic Bestowal Skill Acquired]
>[Weapon Reinforcement Skill Acquired]

In addition, I also acquired this title.

>Title [Magic Spear Blacksmith] Acquired.

Since they look useful, I activate the skills.

◇

I try putting magic into an ordinary dagger.

It's different.

In case of Liza's spear, it feels like pouring water on a shallow plate, while with this dagger, it's like pouring water into a coarse draining casket. Magic power that has been inserted immediately escapes feel.
Of course, it also isn't shining with red light.

This time I take out leg of a flying ant and try putting magic power into it.
It's better than with the dagger earlier, but it feels like a clogged up pipe with water draining

out. The poured magic power feel stuck and drained, it's annoying.

Should I try to forcibly insert the magic power?
I try what I've just thought, and it burst scattering away. I guess Liza's spear was one step away from becoming this.

I test again with a new ant's leg. So it really explodes by pouring 10 MP.
Is Liza's spear special or is it because the difference in material?

I decide to try with material that looks more rugged.
I take out a dragon tooth and try it. Although I said tooth, it's 30 cm big.
When I put magic power into it, it feels like with the ant's leg. The difference is the magic endurance, it's fine even with 500 MP, but I stop there since the tooth becomes cracked.

Since I'd feel bad for Tama and Mia if I go back too late, I decide to finish for this evening. Without forgetting to set the menu, I go back.

The angelic figures of sleeping Tama and Mia greet me when I get back.
Tama wakes up when she hears the sound of me leaning Liza's spear on the wagon. Afterward, when she realizes the one who make the sound is me, she slovenly sprawls with "Gude~", but it seems that she isn't sleeping.

She sits beside me, attempts to climb up on my laps, and sleeps there while curling up.
I remember *neko nabe* seeing her figure, it's soothing. I decide to do the watch in place of the two until morning.

Part 4 - The First Thieves [Revised]

Satou's here. I thought that the three precepts are, "Don't kill", "Don't steal", "Don't violate", but in truth, it wasn't, "Don't steal", but, "Don't burn".

However, even if it's not one of the three, bad things are bad, right.

◇

""Good morning, master.""
"Good morning."

Lulu and Liza who have immediately woken up with the first sign of morning sun give me morning greetings.
I let Tama down from my laps, and take Liza to the spear in order to apologize to her.

"T, this is."

Even Liza is speechless.
Since externally, her important spear looks like it has been scribbled. Let's apologize first before I say, "The performance has been improved.".
After I make up my mind, I step forward toward Liza-- but, she's not looking at me.

Seemingly to check on the spear's condition, she tries stabbing with it many times. The red light that appears when she does heavy blow is stronger than before.

"Master!"

After she finishes swinging the spear, she comes closer to me. I decide to listen to her complaints before I make an excuse. Her voice's tone is a bit high, would be good if she's not angry.

"This is, it must be a reward right!"

Since I don't understand the flow of the conversation, I ask her.

"Arisa was saying to Lulu, 'If you properly service master, you'll get a reward someday.', she said."

Those, "service", and, "reward" probably have different meaning. That Arisa, don't indoctrinate weird things to Lulu.
For the time being, since she looks really happy, let's ride on this flow.

"It's because Liza has always worked hard. How is the spear?"
"Yes, the weight is the same as usual, but it is now possible for my arm to become one with the spear up until the tip."

She looks so happy, she's rubbing her cheeks on the spear, I apologize to her for arbitrarily

doing something to her spear after the breakfast before we depart. Liza says, "My spear and I, everything is master's.", but I remind myself not to take advantage of that.

◇

Since Lulu will call me when Liza finishes breakfast preparation, I pick a towel and go to river beside the camping ground. There's a river nearby, so I want to take a bath there. By the way, the water temperature is below 10 degree (celcius), so normally I'd get a cold. Although, I don't feel that cold, maybe thanks to ice resistance.
Rather, I'm more interested with Lulu's gaze which I feel from over the bushes. During the cooking, she occasionally takes a glance over here. I thought the bushes should be tall enough to cover me, but...
She's at an age where she would be interested with the opposite sex, I guess it can't be helped.

Sine it would be troublesome in various ways when Arisa wakes up, I wash my body with a soap quickly.
I see several fish outlines before I wear my clothes, so I throw skewers at them catching around 10 fish and put them into the Storage.
I've thought that grilled fish are a staple of breakfast, but Lulu and Liza have already started cooking, cutting in between them now would be boorish.

I wipe my body roughly and wear clothes.
My hair is still wet, but it should be dried soon when it gets close to fire.

"Good morning, master."
"Good morning Nana. Try saying some more words after morning greeting."
"Good morning, master."
"Yep, that's good."

I pat Nana's head while praising her.
Ye~p. Her outward appearance is that of an adult woman, so patting her head looks really out place.

"Morning."
"Ning~?"
"Good morning nano desu!"
"Good Morniii!"

The other members are waking up. I also greet them back.
Still, what's wrong Arisa?

"Why?"

What is she saying?
Arisa points my wet hair.

"Say something if you want to take a bath!"

"No way. You'll go peep if I tell you right?"
"Of course! It's my natural job as a slave to wash my master's back!"
"Your real motive?"
"A boy bathing at the center of mother nature! Missing that is a regrettable situation!"

When you said that so frankly, I could not punish you.
Usually, before we go to sleep or after breakfast, I go away alone to wipe my body with wet towel and Arisa usually try to peep me which she did once when she managed to escape from Liza's watch. I don't necessarily scold her when she peeps but since it'd be a bad influence to other girls, I'd give her spanking if I catch her peeping.

...How do I say this, feels like our role as man and woman is reversed.

◇

That day, my magic practice ends in failure again, to have a change of pace, I sit at the end of the wagon and make small shields using some wood.
Since I get Armor Creation skill after making one, I put it point to the maximum and activate it. Even though the shields are made of woods, they're made with the highest level technique of armor creation.
Since it's messy, I put a sheet for the fallen wood chips. I present two shields made after I've acquired the skill to Pochi and Tama. There are some shields in my storage but there is none which could fits Pochi and Tama so I have to make them myself.
I've only just made three of it but since the time is almost up, I clear away the tools.

Arisa who has noticed it, faces toward me.

"The guys you mentioned earlier?"
"Yeah, very soon. There are two people on the highway, five people in each forest on the sides of highway, and two people on a tree a bit further. Arisa will deal with the two on the highway, while the five in the right forest will be taken care by Liza, Pochi and Tama. I'll defeat the two on the tree and the five in the left forest. I will leave Lulu's guard to Mia and Nana."

Everyone nods at my instruction. Since I've explained it beforehand, they don't have any particular question.
Everyone is tense, but the enemies are no big deals. On the left side, beside a level 7, the others are small fries at level 2-3. The beast girls could annihilate them alone if they want.

When we enter the forest after a slight curve, there are a man and a woman sitting on the road.
They look like normal villagers. "Oo~i", they call out over here.
When the wagon loosen its speed, the man approach while trying to say something.

"I'm sorry, my wife is,s,s,s,s."
"Fuhn, I have no interest with thieves' acting."

Arisa hit the man and woman with mind magic without asking. She had a hard time choosing

a location so our horses wouldn't get swept with her attack. Even though she loves to act a bit dramatic herself.

Yes, these 14 men and women are thieves.

Without checking the result of that battle, I use 2 crossbows alternately to shoot down the bowmen on the tree. They shouldn't be dead.
The beast girls jump out from the back of the wagon and begin their assault in the forest. I also jump from the coachman-stand and charge toward the opposite forest.

In just a few minutes, [Oyu Village Thieves Gang] is annihilated. Half of them are injured but none dies. We hang them on trees while disarming their weapons. I feel wasteful to use ropes on them, so I roll them up with tree vines, per Liza's suggestion.
I've noticed this with the accident faker in the city back then, there is no punishment for, [Injuring] and, [Assaulting] in this world. Just to be sure, I check on everyone's status and their Reward and Punishment hasn't changed.

The thieves have been subjected to Arisa's magic, Sleeping Field to make them sleep.
Just in case, checking on the map, there is no village called, "Oyu Village", in this region.

"By the way, what do you want to do by capturing them? Isn't the earl-san's city still relatively far away? Isn't it faster if we just kill them?"
"Since I was ordered not to kill if possible, I did not kill anyone, but thieves should be killed as soon as one comes across them. If master wants the prize money then their heads are enough. Furthermore, even if ones kill a thief, their Reward & Punishment won't change into [Murderer]."

Arisa and Liza's suggestions are quite brutal, but I wonder if that's just how it is in this world. If I overlook these guys here, they would probably kill or sell merchants or travelers who use this road as slaves.

Even so, I don't want to see the beast girls kill people, and I, myself, don't want to kill. I want to avoid murder as much as possible.
But then, I feel like I would retract that if my companions' lives are in danger. Even if I'm a hypocrite, I am not a saint, if that time really happens I'll give in.
I did kill Zen anyway, even if it was his own intention.

"Let's bring them to the earl's city and sell them as crime slaves. Is it not more profitable than killing them here?"

Even though I don't want to kill them, I have no intention of letting them go. I will have them pay for their crime adequately. Their [Reward and Punishment] stats are filled with [Murder], [Rape], [Theft] and more. There is no innocent one.
Liza has a face that looks like she has more to say, but it seems that she doesn't have any intention to object my words more.

"It can't be helped~ let's do it like that."

While saying so, Arisa shakes her head like some kind of gaijin. I understand that she's worried, but that gesture is slightly petulant.
Then, she points her finger at me, and continues with these words.

"If your life is in danger, don't hesitate to kill the opponent, understand. That is the rule of this world. I won't forgive you if you drag your peacefulness like that country and get yourself killed pitifully!"

◇

Still, 14 people are too many indeed. Even though the wagon hardly has any luggage, more than half of the wagon's back is buried with the thieves. Morever, they stink.
Since it'd be annoying if they wake up, in addition to Arisa's magic, I make them drink sleeping potions that I've made on the first camping night and take them along to the earl's city while they're sleeping.

Although it's just for two days, the thieves' smell and snores are huge nuisances.
If we find another thieves, I'll leave them half-dead. I did not think that bringing criminals away from a remote place would be this troublesome.

Part 5 - Clean-up and Rumor

Satou's here. The only contact I've had with refugees was with the news or fund-raising commercials, but in this world, I unexpectedly come across ones in close proximity.

◇

It was already late in the noon when we arrived on the street of Nouki town. The disposal of the thieves took more time than I had thought.

This town is the second biggest town within earl Kuhanou's territory, it's situated in a typical fashion of a trading town. Nevertheless, the population is not more than 20000. The land size is also only about a fourth of Seryuu city. 30% of the population are slaves, but most are general or lower slaves, while criminal slaves are quite few.

The thieves--they were confirmed as thieves with the usual Yamato stone--were sold to slave traders that the gatekeeper had called. The men were worth 2 silver coins a person. The ones with bow or weapon skills and higher-leveled were were even more expensive, but the women were cheaper. A middle-aged woman was worth for only 1 silver coin.
As a reward for suppressing the thieves, I was given 10 copper coins per head. Was the price right?

The total amount to 48 silver coins and 140 copper coins. With these much, a lot of bounty hunters would have come instead of me.

The taxes for entering the city are, 1 big copper coin for a commoner, 2 copper coins for a slave, and the wagon cost 2 big copper coins, I let it be taken from the reward.

I chat with the gatekeeper while he's looking for a small bag for containing the 5 silver and 10 copper coins change. He's wearing a shirt dyed blue, I wonder if it's the gatekeeper color here.

"You've really saved us. Nowadays, a lot of refugees coming from other territories are becoming thieves."
"Was there a disaster somewhere?"

Speaking of refugees, it mean that there's probably a war or disaster.
According to him, seems that there are a lot of refugees who run away from the next earldom to become either serfs in rural farm village or slaves in general slaves in the city of this Kuhanou earldom.
People who don't want to become slaves hide in the mountain and live by hunting animals. Seems that they also work in the field, but, as winter comes, a lot increasingly become thieves.

I almost feel sorry to the thieves, but they have [Murder] in their Reward and Punishment, so sympathy is probably unnecessary.

>Title [Bounty Hunter] Acquired.

◇

Now then, we were able to finish our errands on the entrance, but since I wanted to buy various things on shortage, I decided to stay for a night.
The inside of the town is similar with Seryuu city but there aren't a lot of two-story buildings, yet low-rises are many.

The town feel a bit listless unrelated with the population density.
Confirming from the gatekeeper, this town also has strong prejudice against demi-humans, but they're allowed to stay in the inn if one pay extra and they can buy things normally on the shops if they're paying good. Unfortunately, since they're not allowed to get inside where the riches and nobles lives, we are warned not to get close.

After entrusting the wagon in the inn, we're going to buy equipments for all members. In a place not far from the inn, weapons and armors are lined up on display.

First, let's buy armor for five people in the armor shop. They're for me, Nana and the three beastkin girls. Since a whole body armor looks to require too much time to wear, I buy iron helmets without face protector, breastplates with belt fixture, light greaves of the same type, and gauntlets that protect only the back of hand.
The remaining three says that they don't need armor so they don't buy ones, in exchange, I buy some extra shields. Bucklers and Round Shield made from metal, three pieces each.

The armor shop old-man tried to touch Nana's butt when he was measuring her for the armor, but my impregnable guard didn't let him to. I didn't think that crisis perception would be helpful for this. It goes without saying that I used it as the final ammunition for bargaining.

The total price were 30 gold coins, but I negotiate until it was slightly cheaper than the market price, and finally got it down to 14 gold coins.

Next in the weapon shop, I bought bows and arrows for Mia. Since there were only 3 short bows that Mia was able to pull, it didn't take long. I was able to negotiate it down to 1 gold coins with 30 arrows added.

Afterwards, we decided to divide into three groups and move separately after putting the luggage in the inn.

The beastkin girls, Arisa and Lulu are entrusted to buy ingredients, daily necessities and cookwares.
I give them 20 silver coins for the shopping list, and 1 big copper coin each for their allowance. The reason for that much silver coins is because I ask them to buy a lot of groceries.

Like the gatekeeper earlier said, the situation is a bit rough with all the refugees, so I'm buying enough for anticipating the worst situation for self-sustaining if we can't get into the

town or village. We have a lot of meat, but we don't have enough vegetables, cereals, salt and seasoning.

Pochi and Tama reply back with, "Meat~", when I give them their allowances. Even though they eat so much meat every day, they still want to eat more huh, that's amazing even for favorite food.

"I'm tired."
"Maybe you get tired from the crowds, do you want to rest at the inn?"
"Nn."
"Nana, I'm sorry, but could stay with her?"
"Yes, master. I will stay beside mother."
"No."

Since Mia is tired with the crowd, she's going to rest at the inn. I feel sorry if I leave her alone, so I suggest Nana to be with her, but maybe she doesn't want to be alone with someone with her face, she refuses with, "Don't need."

Even though Nana herself has become emotionally attached to her, this is sad.
The meaning of calling Mia mother for Nana, seems because Mia is the blood provider. Although it seems that homonculus is different with clone, I wonder if she's still her genetic mother?
Since Mia looks like she really dislike the calling, I have Nana compromise to call her, "Mia", not, "Mother".

"Nana, let's go together. Mia, what do you want as souvenirs?"
"I want a lute."
"I understand, I'll buy it if someone is selling them."
"I've left money and fruits on the table, so eat something if you're hungry okay."
"Nn."

I've put 1 big copper coin and several fruits on the table.

◇

First, we're going to magic tools shop.

This shop isn't just a magic books and magic tools shop, but also an alchemy shop and a bookstore. The shopkeeper is wearing a hood and a thin veil that hide her face, save for her eyes, so I can't see it well. Since the AR indicates that she's 16 years old, she's probably the daughter of the real shopkeeper.

When we go inside the shop, I see the girl is wearing glasses with green lenses, so I ask Nana to wait outside. The explanation from the AR is confusing like always, but since it looks like an inferior version of Yamato stone, I can't risk Nana's race from getting known.

"Hello, I'd like to buy reagents for potion, do you have any in stock?"
"I could sell you three packages. 1 silver coin each. We're a bit short in magic cores, so I

won't give you discount. If you don't want to, you can stop."

Oh, it's an old woman's voice. Is she using some sort of weird voice-changing magic tools?
I'm given a small paper, like some sort of prescription from doctors, when I receive the packages. I think her profit is a bit too high, but since the price is in line with the market price according to estimation skill, it's not like she's overcharging.

By the way, the potion reagent is powder that glitter when it's used. It has other various uses too, it's an indispensable material for training.

Come to think of it, monsters in this territory were awfully scarce.

I don't feel like buying with these prices indeed. Since I have books with the instruction, should I just make one myself? Let's just buy the needed materials.

"Then, do you have stabilizers?"
"Yes, if it's stabilizers, I have a lot. If you have magic cores, won't you share it?"

What an abrupt girl. Asking me to sell the magic cores.
Then I remember the main material for potion's reagent and stabilizer.

I take out a magic core from my pocket and estimate its market price on my palm. It's about three times pricier than in Seryuu city. Yet, it's still only 3 big copper coins. I put five on the table.

"You, stop putting magic cores inside your pocket even if you keep them together with stabilizer powder. What would you do if they absorb magic power when you use magic and explode?"

What the, they explode huh.

That reminds me, the ants legs were exploding as well.
I thank the girl for the advice and ask her the right method to keep them. It seems that you have to smear them in stabilizer and then cover them together in cloths.

The girl speaks ill of the magic cores, like, "They're small", or, "The color is light", but she still buy them for 4 big copper coins each. Since it's just right, I buy stabilizer worth of that price.
The girl comes back from the back with about 10 kilograms bag of stabilizer. That bag is somehow lightly floating while following beside the girl.

Ooh, that looks magic-like, or rather, like a magic trick.

"Is that magic?"
"This is self-propelling board <<Floating Board>>. It's not really a rare magic, isn't it?"

Although she's saying that, I could see her looking slightly proud. If I recall right, that magic name does appear in the introductory magic book.

I confirm the stabilizer that she have brought. The AR says, [Stabilizer/Fine Powder of Ugi Leaves]. The market price is 5 gold coins. 1 gold coin is equal to 20 big copper coins, so they're too much for reimbursing the magic cores.

"They're fine powder of Ugi leaves, are they."
"That's right, you know well. These are rare around here, but just before, a merchant brought them in mass as a payment for medicines. Before they're spoiled."
"I think this quantity is too much for 20 big copper coins though?"
"You, you know value of things huh."
"And I don't think I need that much though?"
"Please don't say that, I'll trade it for half the market price, so won't you take it?"
"Are you looking for gold coins?"

I could buy it, but do I need this much?

"No no, I need magic cores rather than gold, won't you share a bit more?"

Well, they're ingredients for making potion reagent so she probably guess that I still have more, but what does she want to use it for?

"You know that there will be a fighting tournament in the Ougock Dukedom next month, right? The participating knights are buying large amounts of potion from the alchemists. So they can't make potion for the sick people."

I see, there's such tournament huh. I don't know if this girl would use it the way she's saying, but it's evident that she's desperate. I have a lot anyway, so it's fine to give 10 more, I guess.

"I would like these and another 10 magic cores of the same level."
"I'm not sure if I have that many, but I'll thoroughly check my stock."
"Please do so, you can bring these stabilizer ahead."

I bring the stabilizer to the wagon and put it away in the storage, then I'm choosing magic cores. Since it'd look suspicious if they're all exactly the same, I mix the 10 magic cores suitably. I blend 1 high level one among them. It's a core that worths 3 silver coins.
I believe this is from a bone golem. I can know the price with estimation skill, but I want to find out the reaction of a professional when they see one.

"How about these?"
"You're fast, the qualities are the same like before, are they. Huh? This one is the only awfully nice core."

It's the strongish core I've blended

"Is it to your liking?"
"Yes, I'm saved. I could make stronger medicine with this."

I see, according to this reaction, I could take out magic cores from monsters with level up to 20 without problem.

It's not written in up to intermediate book, but it seems that depending on magic cores level used, the resulting reagent rank would be different.

"As a gratitude, you can take one from among these."

While saying so, the girl searches the shelves with rustling sounds and bring out three scrolls. AR indication says, [Scroll, Magic Art:Shield], [Scroll, Magic Art:Sonar], [Scroll, Magic Art:Short Stun]. Each is priced at 5-6 silver coins.
How do I say this, the shop will go bankrupt if this girl keep working here.

Every one of them seems to be an elementary magic art scroll. Shield is the most difficult among these.

"I'm sorry, even though you're especially offering this for me, I already have beginner level magic books..."
"You, do you not know how scrolls are used? These are disposable magic tools. Put magic power into it while uttering the command word to use it, it's convenient when you're attacked by monsters."

Hoo? That's great.

"That means, you can use them even without magic art skills?"
"You can use them. You'll use 20-30% more magic power, but there is no weird repercussion like if a person without skill chants the magic."

I see, that's convenient.
But, they looks easy to abuse-- I guess that's why, it was limited in Seryuu city.
That's right, are there scrolls for life magic?

"Do you have scrolls for life magic?"
"None, if you have money to buy such things, isn't it cheaper to just hire charm users?"

Unfortunately, there's none. It seems since the production cost for making the scroll is no different to other magic, there's no one who make them.
But, Nana can use those magics besides short stun. By the way, in addition with the two, Nana can also use, [Magic Arrow], [Body Reinforcement (Light Boost)], and [Signal].

"If possible, could you let me have the three of them? Of course, I will pay the other two with cash."
"I'm sorry, but if I sell more than one, the officials would get noisy."

I decide to buy [Shield] scroll after being at loss for a while.
Let's try to use it when we get out of the town.

Part 6 - Tavern and Rumors

Satou's here. On the old computer game, tavern was only useful for changing party members, but on TRPG, it was the place to gather information for the scenario.

Since drunkards are talkative.

◇

"Thanks for waiting, Nana."
"Yes, master."

Uh, did I make her wait too long.
Maybe thanks to the hood she's wearing, there is no weird guy trying to pick her up, but she looks quite bored. Nana picks my arm and begins to walk.

"Let's go, master."

We're walking while linking arms. Umm, Nana-san? My arm is in heaven.
Since the long cane I've bought for Mia at the beginning is being a hindrance, I switch it to my other hand.

"What's wrong?"
"I've learned it when master was in the shop."

What's this, I feel a bad premonition.

"When man and woman walk together, they unite their arms."

She's saying so while having, "How's that" face, I can even hear the sound effect.
I understand what she has learned, but there's no particular reason to part our arms, so let's go shopping while being like this.
Since Nana is looking like she really want to get praised, I read the mood and praise her. It's subtle, but She looks satisfied. And I'm also satisfied with the amazing feeling.

First, let's buy clothes for Nana and Mia.

However, there's no shop which sells ready-made clothes except the second-hand ones in this town. It seems you have to tailor them if you want new clothes. I think Arisa has said she could make clothes, so I decide to buy cloth and materials for sewing.
They're selling underwear normally, so I buy shares for the two. These underwear are called drawers right? Feels like I've entered Alice's Wonderland.

Next are tools for manufacturing things.

By asking a pedestrian for the location, I've bought various tools for woodworking, metal carving, leather crafting, and blacksmithing.

I've also bought glue, nails and other materials, but beside nails, they're expensive. I've also wanted to buy some hinges, but they were out of stock.

Necessary things for blacksmithing like furnace or anvil were not available, so I couldn't buy them. Though even if I could, there was no way to carry them anyway.

Since we would be standing out if we bring lumbers to the inn, I pay for it to be sent to the hotel.

"Nana, shouldn't we go to next shop soon?"
"Master, please wait a bit longer."
"Is it fun?"
"Yes, very. It's so fluffy and soft... yes, cute."

Since Nana is fascinated with the wood shaving waste from the wood planing, and doesn't seem to want to move, we spend a bit of time in the wood workshop.
If the workshop old man didn't get her the thinnest and long wood shaving, she might be looking till dusk.

I purchase bottles and containers for putting medicine since I incidentally catch sight of them on the next workshop we've gone. The price around here is cheaper than on Seryuu city. It might be because the woods that act as fuel are cheap.

We go to the general store at the end.

I was taught in magic shop that there might be cooking books there.

Nana who have been restlessly looking around inside the general store, wanders to a particular display case.

"What's the matter?"
"Master, what is this?"

While saying so, Nana pick up something to her hand, it's a wooden barrette.
It's carved with simple design and three pale small stones are fitted in. The stones are not gemstones, but river stones with stripped patterns. It looks like jade so I appraise it, and the result is actinolite. The name sounds as if it could be used as catalyst for light magic, but it's just a pretty stone.
The market price of the barrette is two copper coins. There are 5 other wooden barrettes, but they're all priced the same.

It's a bit plain for decorating Nana's honey-colored hair. I think she'll look better with a silver barrette.

Nana is looking at that barrette without getting tired.
The store's old woman who see that begins promoting.

"Fe, fe ,fe, I also have ones made from silver, or adorned with gemstones, do you want to

see it?"
"Right then, since you're offering, let's take a look at it."

She puts out three expensive barrette made from silver, I try putting one on Nana's hair. Yup, the silver one does match her well.

"Oh my, you have truly beautiful wife."
"That's right, I'm still charmed sometimes."

I've certainly got used with the beautiful faces of Lulu and Arisa, but Nana and Mia are quite pretty too. She's not my wife, but I don't need to retort to every lip service.

Nana strokes the first barrette with her fingers in rapture even while we're having that conversation.
You like it that much huh.
I'm sorry for the old woman for bringing out the other things, but I purchase the wooden barrette instead.
I also buy several blue braids as souvenirs since it was placed nearby. It's just right since Lulu usually tie hemp cord on her hair when she's making breakfast. There are also ribbons, but I stop. I've given some to Lulu as present before, but I've never see her wearing it. It probably wasn't to her liking.

Now then, the main thing is the cooking books, but it's different from what I've imagined. Rather than recipe books for what delicious foods from what towns, or what kind of materials are there, it's a gourmet guide book instead. Of course, I buy it, but it doesn't seem usable for improving my cooking.

"Are you looking for curious foods? Then how about some herbs or pickled vegetables?"

The old woman brings out some bottles and jars sealed with string from inside a shelf.

Around 20 kinds of things like, garlic and leeks pickled with oil, pickled cabbage and Chinese cabbage, and yellow powder that looks like dried mustard and others.

Even though so many come out, there's no pickled plum. Too bad.

There are also sweet things like honey, or
green-tea powder-like sugar called Ugi, I'm buying them.

Furthermore, somehow I'm coaxed to buy a tool for extracting fat from meat. Old woman, you're good at business.

Since I've bought so many things, I thought that I'd carry them many times over to the inn but the old woman calls manly man from the shop's back and has him to transport the groceries to the inn.

Right, I almost forgot.

"Do you have a lute?"
"I do."

The old woman points at Nana. It's put together on the same desk as the barrette. Not seeing it even though it's right in front of your eyes, it happens often eh.
I purchase the lute and string for Mia. I try playing the string and, [Tiin], sounds comes out.

>[Musical Performance Skill Acquired]

◇

"Ehehe~ Look, look at these bounties!"

The wagon is loaded with a lot of ingredients and woods and tools I've bought.
The thing that Arisa present are eggs inside a basket. There around 20 of them.

"They're a bit expensive, but I've gotten some duck eggs~ with this we can eat egg dishes!"
"Eggs are fast to go bad, so let's think what to make before. How long can we keep it?"
"It's already winter, so about 2-3 days?"
"We could make something like karaage or croquette."
"C, can you make it?"
"If I know the recipe I could, but I can only vaguely remember the ingredients and the process."

I tried to bring up the subject to Arisa, but it seems she doesn't know.

"Uh, I should've kept trying to cook for myself without giving up."

I barely remember that I should use eggs and flour. No, or was it potato starch?
Since the storage can preserve things, I should just get five eggs inside and do trial and error during the journey.

Later, I'm taught by Liza that eggs can be stored for several months. Don't modern eggs have short expiration dates? I don't know if it's because parallel world, but I won't complain the long-lastingness.

We decide to eat dinner at the tavern on the first floor of the inn that evening. Since there's an empty space on the back, we join two tables and sit there. Mia sits on the chair furthest back. Since it'll be full of people later, she's not good with crowd.

The meal consists of moderate amount of tenderloins with boiled vegetables, fish and radish soup, stir-fried vegetables, dried berry, flat bread made from Gabo fruit, and pickled Gabo leaves. The aren't a lot of meat, but the stomach-filling tenderloins are popular with the beastkin girls.
At the opposite side of me, Mia continues playing the lute that has just been bought even though it's dinner, she probably likes it.

"Mia, it's dinner, so eat your meal."

"Nn."

She nods at my words, but doesn't let go of the lute. Her performance is over, but seems she's wondering whether to continue or eat.

"Aan."

She opens her small mouth while starting to play the lute. Since she looks like a cute young bird, I put a bite-sized vegetable on her mouth.
She chews it hard while playing a song. I wonder if it's an elf tune, it's a tune with wanting to hurry home feeling.
My sleeves is pulled from the side, and when I look there, Arisa is opening her mouth while point her finger there.

"Aa~an"
"Eat it yourself."
"Doing that only to Mia, isn't it unfai~r?"

Can't be helped when you say it like that. I give her a mouthful of pickled Gabo leaves. It's sour and bitter, the taste is unique. She probably won't ask for another with this.

She's saying, "Mugu", and, "I want something sweet please.", but she doesn't say she want another, so it's a success.

"Satou, Aan."
"Aa~n?"
"Aan, nano desu."

What comes into my view is Mia, with Pochi and Tama who are sitting on each sides of her opening their mouth. When the three are lined up like this, they really look like young birdlings. I put a mouthful for each one in turn.
Following them, Lulu also doing, "Aan", while looking shy. I want you to stop opening your small mouth while pining your hair and closing your eyes, I would imagine something different. Liza is also doing, "Aan" since it looks interesting, but I have no comment. Since she doesn't look uncomfortable, there's probably no problem.

My sleeve is pulled again.
I thought that it was Arisa again, but it was from the opposite side. Over there, Nana is doing, "Aan", while presenting a dish.

I see, since Nana couldn't eat, she's serving it instead.

Umu, I'm fine with feeding little girls, but if they look like adult beautiful girls, the destructive power is high. I eat the dish while feeling bashful.

Violet-san on the opposite side seemingly can't stand my attitude, and she's saying things like, "Flirting is forbidden", or, "Riajuu should just explode.". Since those kinds of slightly peevish protest came out, another, "Aan", is prohibited.

The one who took advantage of this in the first place is you, Arisa, you know?

Mia is concentrating on eating her foods with Liza's warning. I'm a bit shocked that she's paying heed to Liza's word than mine--I might be spoiling her too much--the dinner continues while I'm feeling like a father.

Mia who finishes her dinner first starts playing some musics. The beastkin girls and Arisa are eating their second round of meal.
At first the music was calm but then it turns cheerful after a request from the drunkards. Even though Mia is playing with expressionless and uninterested face, she still receives the drunkard's impulsive request.

Once Mia musical begins, the visitors begin to increase until it's full house, even though it was empty when we just got here. Arisa is judging the drunkard request properly. She's doing it while having meals, skillful.

And then, when they've finished eating, Arisa leads Pochi and Tama to match the song and sing together cheerfully while joining shoulders. The three are wearing hoods, so they look subtly suspicious. I thought that I remember this song, it's the anisong Arisa sung during our trip.

"What a fun song huh."
"It's a song from the hometown of those girls."

The merchant-like man on the seat behind starts talking to me, so we're chatting while putting sake to our cups. I'm drinking normal juice, not sake. The sake here (ale), is too sour, or rather, it's acid it's undrinkable.
The stories in our chat are mostly harmless, but there are also some interesting ones. In summary, the chats are like these.

"I've just been through baron Muno's territory and I was offered to buy slaves from several villages there, it was terrible."
"The harvest this year isn't bad, I wonder why."
"Speaking of slaves, if you bring out slaves from baron Muno's territory, you need to pay tax. Farmers who want to go to other territory also need to pay tax. Was it emmigrant tax. The border soldiers even specially inspect for it."

The merchants exaggeratively shiver for almost buying slaves themselves.
I thought it was supposed to be marquis according to that travel journal, so I asked.

"Don't you know young man? They were certainly marquis up until about 20 years ago but the whole family of marquis Muno were attacked by large flocks of the dead, and the castle and the soldiers, everyone were massacred."
"I forgot the title, but it was even made into books and drama."
"At that time, it became an uproar and was thought to be an attack from the demon lord, the groceries and medicines prices went up and I made a big profit."

It's an imprudence story, he seems to be an unscrupulous merchant.

"I also remember to feel relieved that the king had ordered the holy knights to dispatch, limiting the dead army from overflowing to other territories."
"All related families of marquis Muuno, including the collateral family who married into another families, died of mysterious cause. The current baron supposedly has absolutely no relation to the old one. He's either a nephew or younger brother of the neighboring duke, he has succeeded the family name to manage the territory."

That story sounds familiar. What comes to my mind is his (Zen's) bleached bone face.
I've become a listener, while properly chiming in sometimes and pouring sake, I press them to continue.

"There's a strange rumor about that dukedom. There's a man who will buy corpses of anything."
"Isn't that just a simple rumor? There's a forest which became a place for burial custom due to some faith, and the rumor started from someone who saw the proceeding they said."
"Is that what it is, so they're traveling on the highway where monsters and wolves appear for several days while carrying corpses, faith is an amazing thing."
"Something that can't be said to merchants like us."

However, "Corpse Buying Man", that looks like something that would become a novel's title. Speaking of the duke, I've heard a rumor in the morning.

"It seems that there's a fighting tournament on the dukedom, is everyone familiar with that?"
"People surely gather there, but merchants do too."
"Thus, merchants' number are reduced in other place. I intend to fill that gap for my business."

I've thought that this is a world where the money circulation takes time, but it seems there are many ways to gain money.

Mia's performance has stopped before I notice. The surrounding are urging her, but looks it's too much, she says one word, "Tired.", and sleep on my lap. I think you don't need to go as far under the table though.

We take that chance and go back to the room. Arisa says, "We got a lot of offering~.", while showing a bowl with a lot of coins. They're mostly pennies, but there are some copper coins mixed in. Quite generous, those drunk old men are.

I let Mia sleep in the room. There's no 8 person room as expected, so I rent two 4 person room. The three beastkin girls and my room, and Arisa and the others' room. We had various disputes during the room's distribution. I'm afraid that I'd think something impolite if I see Nana innocently sleeps on the bed.

I've thought of doing something on the night town stealthily, but I'm prevented by Pochi and Tama. "Let's sleep together nodesu." with gleaming eyes, they bind both my hands. The wire-puller is Arisa without a doubt, but I can't shake off the two who approach with

innocent faces.

I pass on the adult's night once in a while~.

Part 7 - I want to Practice Magic [Cheat Arc]

Satou's here. The impulse to use the thing you've obtained is probably no different regardless of ages or places.

Even in parallel world, it still is.

◇

"■▼▲▲ ▲■▲▲ ▲▲ Shield"

A transparent shape that looks like a Shield appear in front of me who's holding a short cane. The size is large enough to cover my whole body.

"Here I go~ Psycho Ball."

The invisible magic ball fired by Arisa got repelled by the Shield and disappeared.
Oh, a new indicator has appeared below my HP bar, [Shield HP], it says. The HP is 100, and it has decreased by one from Arisa's attack earlier. I wait for a while, but it's not restoring back.

"Is it alright for the next one?"
"Come at me."
"Here I go Tsubaki-kun! This is, my Overdrive shoot!"

Arisa fires Shock Wave while parodying something. The Shield shooks from that attack, but it's repelled just like with the psycho ball earlier.
This time the Shield's HP decreases by 3 points. So it doesn't decrease by fixed value, but depends on the spell huh?

"Then, next, please use Magic Arrow, Nana."
"Yes, master."

A magic circle appears before Nana's forehead and the magic arrow is shot from there.
The magic arrow disappears accompanied with sounds like metal clashing. The Shield's HP only decreases by 1.

"Next, Mia, please."
"Nn. ■■■ ■■ ■■■■ Water Shoot"

Mia creates Water Shoot from the water inside the jug beside her, and then fires it to me. At the moment of impact, the Shield shooks a bit. The magic is dissolved and the water splashes under. The Shield's HP only decreases by 1 point.

"Mia, do you have any area attack?"
"I do."
"Then, please do that from the front."

"It's dangerous."
"Do you have attack that would be safe for everyone but me?"
"I do."
"Then please do that one."
"...Satou?"
"I'll avoid it before it hit me."
"Nn. ■■■ ■■■ ■■■■■■ Acid Mist"

White mist hits the Shield. The mist is prevented by the Shield, but the grasses around me are dying. The Shield's HP decreases by 3 points.

So direct attack magic is 1 point, while area attack magic is 3 points huh. Isn't this Shield too strong?

"Tama, please throw some stones. Aim at the area around my stomach."
"Aye!"

Swoosh, the stone tears through the air, and just like all the magic before, it's prevented. The stone bounces back unlike the magic. Tama is getting better at stone throwing, Her throw has gotten quite faster. The Shield's HP only decreases by 1 point.

"Alright, next, Pochi. Shoot with a crossbow, since it's dangerous, shoot from around there okay."
"Understood, nodesu~."

The short arrow that Pochi shoots has different aim, she accurately shoots at my left foot that my finger has pointed out. Of course, the arrow bounces back before it hit me. The Shield's HP decreases by 1 point, just like with Tama's stone-throwing.

Now then, next is Liza, but honestly, I'm afraid with the serious Liza who will be using [That Spear]. I cancel the Shield, and put it up once again. I understand that it's actually not necessary, but it's a problem with feeling.

"Liza, after you fill the spear full with magic power, please do heavy blow and thrusting with all your might."
"I understand, master. Please be prepared!"

No no, that line is scary.
Bang, the sound of Liza's rushing, she thrusts out the magic spear.
The magic spear pushes the Shield, but just as it's about to hit me, it gets knocked back. At the same time, something invisible is pushing my body. I see, it seems the Shield is suitable to hold back mass attacks huh.

The red ripple that appears between the spear and the Shield disappears.
As soon as the ripple disappear, Liza pulls her spear. Let me make this clear, even if Liza spear pierced through the Shield, it would slip through my armpit.

The Shield HP decreases only by 3 points. Even though it was flashy, it's the same as area

attack huh.

"Liza, next, try to attack me thrice."
"Yes."

Each attack decreases the Shield's HP by 1.
The next experiment will be the last.

"Lulu, please throw a pebble."
"Y, yes, I'll do my best."

However, contrary to Lulu's spirit, the stone flies toward the day after tomorrow. Right, she isn't used to hitting people, unexpectedly it won't fly straight.

"Lulu."
"I, I'm sorry master. Eii. Eii."

Probably thinking that she'd get scolded, Lulu desperately tries to throw stones many times over with upset face. Aah, that's a waste for her beautiful face.

"Lulu, calm down."
"Y, yes."

Maybe thinking that she's disapproved, Lulu falls dejected. Her troubled face is cute too.

"Lulu, take a pebble under your feet."
"Yes, I got it."
"Then, walk three step forward from there."
"Yes.... Umm, isn't this too close?"

Lulu is approximately 1 meter away from the Shield.

"It's fine, throw the stone like you're discarding it using both your hands."
"Yes--Ah, I hit it."
"Yep, you did well. You're great."

Make things easier by removing the impossible condition. 4 more stones hit the Shield, but its HP isn't decreasing. So it really invalidates damage up to certain extent.

◇

Unfortunately, it's not like I've became able to chant.
As for the chant earlier, even though I read the words properly, the rhythm was all over the place.

I activated Musical Performance skill and tried to chant in high spirit, but it was no good. "Uu~n, it's better than before, but it's wrong. Be like Nadami-chan, a good musician who doesn't need to read the sheet.", so said Arisa. It's really frustating.

The trick for solving the puzzle is the [Shield] scroll that I got from the magic shop.
After we left the town, when I used it during our first rest, [Shield] was added on the Magic column in the Menu. At that time, I also got unlabeled [Magic Art] skill, but I wonder if [Magic Art: Foreign World] is a special case?
The magic that I used earlier was selected from the Menu. The chanting was a camouflage, that said, I also slightly wanted to pretend myself being able to chant magic.

Of course, Arisa found out that I wasn't able to chant properly, but since she knew about Menu, it probably was no problem.

Mia seemed unconcerned about it, so there was no problem.

However, the inspection continues.
Next is Nana's turn. Her MP has only decreased by 20% so she should be fine. I'll refill it when this is over.

"Nana, please put up Shield."
"Yes, master."

In front of Nana, a magic-made Shield appears. It looks just like the one I've created.

"Then Arisa, shoot a Psycho Ball at an angle where it wouldn't hit Nana at the Shield."
"Okay."

The Psycho Ball is repelled by the Shield and disappears, just like it was with me.
However, the Shield's HP has decreased by half. Although I don't know the exact value, the Shield's HP amount and hardness are probably different. It probably because of differences in level or skill level.

◇

"Alright, the experiment is over~ let's eat!"

Since the experiment took quite a bit of time, I also participated in the cooking along with Liza and Lulu to help. Moreover, I'm in charge of the main dish, steaks made of wolf meat.
I prepare the wolf meat in turns for the shares of several people excluding Mia and Nana. With Liza's advice, I cut a line on the tendon with a knife and mix salt and pepper in it.
Then, I put oil in the frying pan, stir it, and put sliced garlic inside the oil to let it fry as small dishes. While listening to the sound of oil, I quickly roast the meat. Besides Arisa and Lulu's shares, the meat are to be rare. It seems Arisa and Lulu prefer medium.

For mia's plate, I cut three different kind of fruits and dress it with honey and green sugar.
For Nana's water, I put several drops of fruits juice from Mia's fruits. I want to have a meal together with Nana quickly.

We begin eating with, "Itadakimasu", like always, but it feels more intense than usual. How do I say it, Single-minded, perfectly illustrates their eating.

"Another please!"

Arisa sticks out her steak plate while saying so. Pochi who has finished eating licks the plate, and looks dumbfounded for a while, then she presents her plate, "A, a, another please! nano desu!", she urgently says so.

"Another please!"
"Another please desu!"
"Umm, I also want another serving please."

Slightly late after Pochi, Tama and Liza also present their plates, and ask for another serving. Seemingly following them, Lulu also reservedly ask for another serving.

Well, the meat is still plentiful, but if you eat too much it'll be hard to move you know?

But, it's not over yet.

"Another please."
"Master, another please."

Over there are the figures of Mia and Nana who hold out the empty fruit plate and glass.
I don't have the courage to refuse anymore, and give another serving for everyone.
When I handed it over, I didn't forget to warn that this is the last one.

When they've finished eating, they look supremely blissful, but please stop looking at the plate so eagerly.
It'll be okay if it was Pochi and Tama, but everyone has the same manner, I almost want to ask if they're making jokes.

Afterwards, I was demanded to cook in every meal, but I asked them to only let me do it for lunch.
Since you'll get fat if you eat too much at night.

>Title [Magician of Dining Table] Acquired.

Part 8 - Fashion Show

Satou's here. If I find one G, there would be 30 more, so I always spray insecticide around and round up the whole herds.

◇

After we left the town, it was peaceful for three days, but for two days after that, we were attacked by thieves three times.

Since they were just small scale thieves with 7-8 people, we had Arisa did preemptive attack with Shock Wave, and the beastkin girls to defeat the thieves.

At the first battle, Mia attacked with Acid Mist, but it was too gruesome so I made her use Blind Mist and Mustard Mist on the next time instead.
If I fight right away, I could make short work of them, but since it looked sufficient with just the beastkin girls fighting, I was just standing by while watching them and being ready to cover them anytime if needed. And since the beastkin girls had the advantage of level and fighting experience compared to the thieves, my turn never come up.

We didn't bring the thieves to where people lives after we learned the lesson from the last time. We made them sleep with Arisa's magic, stripped them from all their equipments besides their clothes and leave them tied with ivy rope. If their equipments are taken away, they probably won't be able to continue their thief business. If they tried to force their way, they would get killed instead at best.
I teared off their outer clothes and bandaged them so they wouldn't bleed to death. The earl territorial cavalry who are going on patrol would come across them in several hours, I'm keeping them alive for that sake.
Just in case, I put a paper written with "Thieves" on them.

"We're not getting into the template situation eh~."
"Templa~?"
"Is that delicious nodesu?"

After the second encounter with thieves today, Arisa's mood turns bad.
While grumbling, "I'd like to eat Tempura~", after hearing Pochi's word, she's lazing around on the wagon's floor.

"What kind of template?"
"Usually, shouldn't the theory be the thieves attack carriage with beautiful women or rich man and we come to save them while looking cool?"

I don't know that kind of theory.

"Arisa."
"What is it? Mia."
"Rich man."

Mia points at me while saying so.

"Beautiful women."

Mia points at the girls.

"A blind spot! We are the people who should be saved according to the template!"

Arisa groans while holding her head. Mia looks satisfied after looking at that reaction. She looks expressionless like always, but when I look closer, her mouth is slightly smiling.
Pochi, Tama and even Nana mimic Arisa by holding their head while looking troubled. Nana looks awkward, but let's leave her alone.

◇

"Master, it's the blue men."

Responding to Lulu who's calling me, I go outside to the driver seat. What Lulu means with, "Blue men", are the earl's territorial soldiers. Seems she calls them that since their clothes are all blue.

"We're the knights of Kuhanou-dono, bring me your representative."
"I'm the representative, my name is Satou."
"Hoo, you're young. This highways is often frequented by thieves. It's dangerous to travel without escorts. Go back to the town, and hire some guards."
"Thank you for your concern. We have excellent bodyguards, so it's fine."

I open the wagon's curtain and Liza shows her face.
Liza, please stop that carnivorous smile, it's scary.

"Fumu, quite strong looking escort you have. But, you should keep your escorts outside the wagon so they could see if any thief comes."

After giving that advice, the knights asks for my ID and returns to their patrol after looking satisfied.

◇

"Jaa~an, am I cute?"

Arisa spins around in front of me while saying so. She's looking cute while wearing one piece arranged with frills on its sleeves. When she's wearing that and coupled with her violet hair, she really looks like a character from a fantasy movie.

"Yup, you're cute."
"Ehehehehe~."

She probably has not thought that she would be honestly get praised, she looks surprised and then becomes bashful while looking happy. That feels slightly fresh.

"Cute~?""Look~ nano desu."

Pochi and Tama appears with the similar clothes as Arisa while asking. They spin around like Arisa.

"Pochi and Tama are cute too."
"Wa~i.""Yay~ desu."

It looks like they find the floating skirt fun, they spin around until they become dizzy

"Since you've bought some fabric in the town, I tried adding frills on the clothes we have."
"You're quite skillful."
"I'm experienced with making clothes myself for some events back then~"

It's better not to ask what kind of events are those. She's decided on her pose.
Arisa who's looking proud, suddenly freezes. Nana is posing when I look behind.

"Master, am I cute?"

Cute, or rather, a sight for sore eyes.

"Nana! Wear some clothes, clothes!"

Lulu picks clothes that Nana has left on the ground and cover her with it.
She wears drawers like everyone on her lower-half part, but upper-half has brassiere. They're sewed half-cups. I didn't see anyone selling them in the city, so it was probably something Arisa made.

"Arisa, you're really skillful."
"W, well yeah."

It seems Arisa is weak with getting praised.

"Master, am I cute?"
"You're cute, or rather, sexy. Nana, don't thoughtlessly take off your clothes in front of an opposite sex."
"Yes, master."

I tried as hard as possible to say that calmly. Thanks to Poker Face skill which I've leveled up to expert level, I've succeed on not leaking excitement in my voice.
Nana seems to be satisfied with, "Sexy", comment and obediently wear the clothes that Lulu gives her.
If Lulu didn't react, I would probably fixedly stare at her without moving. If the two of us were alone, it could be dangerous. That's why, I should not hold grudge with Lulu's fast reaction. Though, it would have been nice if she were slightly slower...

"Did you only make clothes for three people?"

To keep up my appearance, I talk to Arisa getting back to the topic.

"Yup, it's impossible to make ones for everyone at once. Since Tama and Pochi were looking at my prototype with gleaming eyes, I made for them first."
"Next, for me."
"Yes, yes, the next one is for Mia. Lulu and Liza will be after that, it's fine right?"
"Yes, it's fine."
"I wouldn't look good with such fancy clothes."
"It'll look good I say. Right, should I add frills on your apron? You'll look like a young wife~."

It's rare to see girl's talk happen. It relaxes me.
While listening to the voices as background, I go back preparing lunch. My repertoire has increased after Liza teaches me. You'd get bored of the wolf meat steak no matter how delicious it is if you eat it everyday.

"Carefully scoop it after the lye comes out. Since it'd be wasteful to throw away the soup, please use this cloth to filter it into the the container and put it into the pot."

I thought that you would just cut the ingredients properly, but it's unexpectedly labor-intensive.

Thanks to Liza's teaching, the result tastes quite good.
I've asked Lulu to make steak in place of me, but losing to the appealing looks of Pochi and Tama during the meal, I decide to make the steak later.

Okay, let's check the effectiveness of education skill by teaching Lulu the secret of grilling steak on the next lunch.

◇

"Satisfied~?"
"It was delicious nodesu~."
"Haa, blissful."

The three are lazing around, while I'm compounding beside them. Recently, Nana and Mia have been helping with the clean-up, so they're not around.

I crush a magic core with my fingers, and put it inside the mortar. Normally, you need nutcracker-like tool to crush it, but this tool is really not user-friendly, so I don't like to use it. Nowadays, I crush cores with fingers in secret.
I thoroughly grind it with the pestle and put it inside a bottle. I sort them inside bottles of various shapes and colors reflecting the effective ranks of the magic cores. I didn't forget to put labels on them too.

Since the magic shop girl has said that even in powder form the magic cores are unstable, I'll try to test how unstable they are.

I put an ear pick worth of powder on top of a wood plank and load it with magic power. Just

when I load 1 point of magic power to it, "Pon", it explodes. The three centimeters thick of plank is perforated until the bottom.
Pochi and Tama who were dozing off jumped up and looked over here blankly. Arisa reproaches me with her sight. "I'm sorry for surprising you.", I said and went back to the experiment.

Still, I think it's more powerful than gun powder even with the same amount. Though, the only gun powder I know is from fireworks or firecrackers, so my comparison might be flawed.

Certainly, a normal person would die if one of this explodes.

I put a red powder made from magic core on a plate and mix it with stabilizer. Since the stabilizer is white, it becomes sakura-colored.

I put a small cut of paper on top of a magic bestowing stand, and then put about 1 gram of the mixture powder on top of it. I operate regulator at the edge of the magic bestowing stand, and set it according to the textbook. After this, I just need to put magic power to the magic bestowing stand.
The reagent is complete in about ten seconds for each. Seen from AR, it's Reagent 1(+5). I wrap the completed reagent with paper like origami as instructed in the textbook, and then put it inside a small bag. I'll put them in the Storage after I've gathered enough.

Since I've gotten the knack, I put 10 grams on my second try and continue on.
I stop after making 100 reagents in 10 minutes.
Next I use those reagents to make recovery potions of magic power, health, stamina, 10 of them each. Since I could make five at once, and I've made other materials besides the reagents beforehand, it doesn't take long to finish.

"Arisa, put these away. Use it whenever you need."
"Ho~i"

I put half of them inside Arisa's item box.

Pochi and Tama who see me tidying the imbuing tools begin to prepare the wagon.
It's Liza's turn to be the coachman this afternoon.

Since there doesn't seem to be any thieves or beasts that are going to attack the wagon, I guess I'll re-investigate the method to make scrolls.

At the time when I got [Shield] magic in my magic column, I immediately searched for the scroll creation method inside the magic books, but I couldn't find it.
I had not only searched in the magic books from Seryuu city, but also the books from Arisa, Zen and Trazayuya, but I still couldn't find it.
When I changed the search words, I did find ways to create magic tools and golem but, there's nothing about magic scrolls.

The next day after that, I always read through magic books looking for hints of magic scrolls

creation. There is absolutely no clue so far, but I've became knowledgeable in type of chanting and magic theory.

Of course, I also have interest with magic tools and golem, but since they need large-scale facilities, it's unreachable for now. There are recipes for magic tools with simple structures, so I'll challenge myself by trying making that on the next break.

I'd like to quickly increase my repertoires, not only for cooking but also magic.

Part 9 - People of Baron Muno Territory (1)

Satous's here. It's hard to work under an incompetent superior. Though, the superior might be thinking the opposite...

If it was just a job then you could just change your workplace, but the territory people could not do that.

◇

We've just entered the territory of baron Muno, so I perform [All Map Exploration] like usual.

It seems that there's a soldier garrison on the pass slightly ahead. There are 20 soldiers around with level ranging on 3-7. Coming out of that place is a flat terrain with sporadically situated small mountains and forests. The area is wider than Kuhanou's earldom. However, the whole population is only around 40000, about 1/3th of Seryuu city.

There is only one big city in the baron's territory, while the rest are just small villages with less than 1000 people each. The town where the baron lives is populated with 20000 people and seems to be called Muno city.

In that Muno city, there's a demon. Level 30. Hiding in the city means it's probably doing something fishy. Since it looks troublesome, I would stay as far away as possible from it.
But, didn't Arisa say that demons which had crossed worlds are executive class? I don't think that it's an executive with this level. I wonder if demons could be born in this world?

Next, I examine monsters in this territory. There is no low level monsters, on the other hand, there are several monsters past level 10 in various place. Even nearby, there's a level 24 monster called War Mantis lurking.

Furthermore, there are also something peculiar, although they're not monsters, in a forest near Munoo city--a 30 kilometers diameter wide, with 20 kilometers at the shortest, huge forest--there are wood giants in the interior. Although there are only 10 wood giants, the strongest one is at level 39. Their levels averaged at 30.

Another notable thing is that there are a lot of thieves. Although I've expected this, most of them are grouped in 10-30 people. The biggest group has around 200 people. It seems that they build their base on the outer edge of the forest where the wood giants live.

Since there are a lot of outlaws, this probably means the public order of this territory is quite bad.

I'd like to take a detour out of this baron's territory, but that means we'd need to circle around to the royal capital, and if we take longer detour, then we'd have to get to duke Oyugock's territory. It'd take roughly two months. Furthermore, according to the traveler's journal, if we get caught in the winter, we wouldn't be able to move until spring.

◇

"Good afternoon, soldier-san, are you not feeling well?"
"Faa, it's nothing, I don't feel like moving today."
"Is that so, thanks for your hard work."
"Umu, you can go through."

The soldier said so while lazily sitting down in front of the military post, and let the wagon through without inspecting it.
His clothes is slovenly worn too, an uninformed person would likely mistakes him with bandit, but he properly belongs to the baron Muno army.

"Hehehe~ Ennui Field is quite usable right~."
"Yeah, we're saved."

Arisa proudly said so while leaning on the driver seat of the wagon which had started running. How long are you going to put the stamina recovery potion bottle on your mouth, that's bad manner you know?

The soldier before was that languid because Arisa casted magic to make the entire garrison's soldiers became tired. Although, since it was morning, there was a high possibility he would be like that anyway even if we didn't use magic.

There's a reason why we deliberately used magic.

From the result of my prior investigation, the soldiers in that garrison had things like [Murder], or [Rape] in their Reward and Punishment, just like thieves. I understand that they're people who do as they like.

I neutralized them in advance rather than getting tangled in counterattack. If possible I wanted them to not realize that they were attacked with magic. That was my plan, so Arisa used Over Boost, coupled with Ennui Field from afar to make the soldiers became languid.

If they had magic detection item then it could be a problem, but it looked more troublesome if we got entangled with those guys, so I picked the relatively low risk method.

It might be problematic if we leave bad guys like them alone, but since the War Mantis is closing in the garrison, their fate is probably already sealed.

I confirm Arisa's status just in case, but her Reward and Punishment hasn't changed.

◇

Afternoon on the same day, when we're passing through a road near a village populated with 300 people, we're called by a man on the side of the road. There are three thin teenage girls beside him. Their faces are quite alright, but since they look fatigued and disheartened, they don't look their ages.

"Sir, won't you buy these girls?"
"I'm sorry, but I don't need slaves."
"Each of them is just 1 silver coin, if you bring them to a big city they would sell well."

The man is promoting with listless voice.
He probably knew that ones would need to pay tax if they want to bring slaves outside the territory.

"Only if there's no tax, furthermore, I don't deal in slave trading."
"Is that so, then, how about becoming your attendants, for 2 big copper coins."

That's cheap.
I won't buy them though.

"I'm sorry, but they're not comparable."

I point at Arisa and Nana who've showed their face after hearing word, 'attendants'. Although they wear hoods, their good looks should be evident.
After the man saw them, he gave up.

"That so, I'm sorry for taking your time."
"I'd like to talk for a bit."
"What is it?"
"Did your village fall into poverty because of bad harvest?"
"It's not that, it was certainly smaller than usual, but we didn't have bad harvest."

Then, was the tax too high?
If the situation continue and they keep selling humans like this, won't the workers gradually run out and the village disappear?

"Even if the tax is high, we could still barely last through winter with the little crops we have."

Is there some kind of unplanned expenditure.

"Was it because of thieves?"
"They're former farmers, we won't be careless enough to let our winter saving get stolen."

The farmers would fight back to death huh.

"Then, did some monsters appear?"
"If that happen then we'd give up. It was congratulatory gift for the baron's daughter wedding, we had to give 30% of our winter saving."

The man exhales heavily while saying so.
This baron is terrible. Although it might be an arbitrary act of the tax collector official.

"Did you not send petition?"

"If we do that, the whole village would end up as serfs."
"That can't be."
"It's true, do you know Tonza village? Everyone in that village was forced to become a serf, there's no one who lives in that village anymore."

For a moment, I thought that he was talking about Oyu village but when I checked the map, there was a place called Oyu village around 20 kilometers from here.
Certainly, there is no village called Tonza, but there's place called [Ruin of Tonza Village]. Is the baron here a tyrant on top of being a fool?

Since I feel a bit curious, I passingly ask.

"Do you know the partner for the baron's daughter wedding?"
"According to the story of the tax collector, it's the hero-sama."

Hero?
I've searched through the territory, but there is no one who have hero title.

The man who seemingly accept my silence talks as if making an excuse.

"It might be an impostor, but the tax collector really said that. You could ask the village head if you want."
"If she's really marrying the real hero, why would they torment the people?"
"Hah, a lower class man who's nothing but a tax tool like me wouldn't know how the big-shots think."

I can't deny that.

However, if he's really the same hero, [A straightforward altruistic fool], like Arisa has said, then we could just ask about the daughter to resolve this question. If I'm not mistaken, that hero has weird preference right.

"I have one more question, how old is the daughter?"
"I'm sure they're 19 and 24 years old women."
"I see, thank you. It's trifling, but here's a compensation for the talk."

I said so while pushing several silver coins to the man and went away with the wagon.

◇

Arisa comes out to the coachman's seat.

"Hey, you seem to have noticed it."
"Yeah, it's an impostor."

Yes, the hero that Arisa has told me, Hayato Masaki, has awkward fetish. He's a lolicon.
I don't think a man like that would take a 19 or 24 years old woman into his wife.
He might have a change of heart, but then he would be swayed with his beautiful women

attendants instead.

"The pervert might has been cured, but that Saga Empire won't make a blunder like letting him marry with a small-time noble from some foreign land."

A shotacon like you probably doesn't have the right to call lolicon a pervert.

Just in case, I try narrowing the search term on the map to check if there's any other hero besides Hayato Masaki.

A person with [Hero] title--Does not exist.
A person with [Unknown] skill--Does not exist.
A person with [Self Status] skill--Does not exist.
A person higher than level 50--Does not exist.

There's no applicable person besides us.
There's no one who could possibly be a reincarnated or transported person either.

There's a fake hero, or there's a hero from another country inside this territory, I wonder which one is it.
I'm guessing that it's a fake hero. I can't help but feel that the demon in Muno city is the one behind this.

However, I don't intend to get involved.
It may be heartless, but I don't want to expose our girls with danger if I try to eliminate the demon and the fake hero.

I decide to circulate anonymous documents if I get a guilty conscience.

Part 10 - Magic Circuit and Rose Engraving

Satou's here. I've made various electronic circuit boards when I was a college student, although I neglected it when I became a working adult.

I didn't think that I would make them in fantasy world...

◇

I don't know if the fake hero really exist, but when I regularly check the baron castle's map, I've narrowed down the most suspicious candidate.
The fake hero's name is Hauto--one character difference with the hero, Hayato Masaki--he's a level 7 young man with one-handed sword and shield skills.
There are also other people who seem to be his companions which are a level 10 swordsman, a level 8 magician, and a level 9 priest. It's a party with good balance, they would've been successful if they earn their shares from labyrinths.

The demon is most likely involved. It's often near the fake hero, Hauto.
However, this demon slips out of the castle at night, and goes to the neighboring forest where the thieves are.

"Master, the replenishment is complete."

Damn, I've wasted this blissful morning time thinking unnecessary things.
Nana who has refilled her magic fix her clothes.

Satou, you'll get another chance on the next break.

...I convinced myself so.

◇

Today I'm making wooden swords on the shaking wagon.
I feel like Pochi's and Tama's battle forms have become sloppy lately, probably because the thieves' level were low, so I'm preparing these for their exercise. I don't want to see them suffer from letting their guard down.

I roll several layers of leather on the wooden swords for safety so they wouldn't get hurt.

"Is it okay to have this~?"
"Pochi also wants to have that nodesu."

Pochi and Tama said so while holding Nana's rapier. The sword is engraved with cute patterns from the guard to the grip. It seem they want to have the wooden swords to have the same kind of patterns as the rose engraving there. These two unexpectedly like cute things.

Do I have to make this?
The two's eyes are full of expectations.

"Is it alright if the design is a bit simpler?"
"This one no good~?"
"No good nano desu?"

Uuh, now it's upturned eyes huh.

"I understand, I'll try it for once."
"Yay~."
"It's going to be okay since it's master, nano desu."
"Work hard~ master."

Arisa cheered on me who had irresponsibly promised them. Dang Arisa, don't look so amused.
Since it's impossible to engrave the design on the completed swords, I decide to shave new ones.

Afterwards, the two are finally satisfied with the engraving after nine tries. Since I've only shaved the guard to the grip part, the blade part is still rod shaped. I should be able to shave the blade parts before the next rest if it's only for two.

>[Engraving Skill Acquired]

◇

"There's no prey nodesu."
"I picked nuts~."

After we've entered this territory, Pochi and the girls only net few hunts. Birds or beasts that could be hunted are scarce along the road. Even with this condition, Tama still shrewdly gather fruits and acorns. In some survival manga, they would cook acorns or insects, but since we're not in food shortage, I keep Tama's harvest for now.

Now then, it's about time to prepare for lunch. Lulu is beside me while wearing different clothes than the usual. She ties her hair with the blue braid like yesterday, but her apron now has frills making her cuteness goes up by 50%.

"I've prepared it."
"Alright, then, put the oil on the frying pan and raise the flame."
"Yes!"

I'm teaching Lulu the secret of steak today. I wonder if she's nervous, she makes a lot of excessive movements. Her face has turned bright red.

"The garlic is enough with that much. Put it on this plate."

Going according to the instruction, Lulu awkwardly use the spatula to move it to the plate. The spatula is made from wood. Since it was inconvenient when I'm making steak without one, I made it myself.

"Listen closely to the sound. Don't close your eyes though."

Lulu performs my instruction, but it seems that she's nervous because our faces are close. It looks like she's not used around men, so I give instructions from behind her shoulders.

"When you hear this sound, it means that the heat is enough, so put the steak in."

Even though she's tense, she's doing it properly, excellent.

"Wait until the the side becomes brown. Turn the steak when you smell this. It's easy to understand when to turn if you utilize the sound and the smell."

I said so with air of superiority, but it was thanks to the skill.

When Lulu has finished grilling the steak, I cut and sample it. Yep, it's a bit inferior compared to the one I make, but it's at the level where she could charge money for it. Lulu also tries it, she's surprised with the meat she has grilled herself.
Since Pochi and Tama are drolling beside us, I cut the meat and feed it to their mouths. And since even Liza and Arisa wait for their turns, the trial steak quickly disappears. You girls have too much appetite.

◇

At a slightly remote place, Pochi and Tama are training using the wooden swords.

Without their usual goofy attitudes, they look very serious.
Pochi attacks in straight line, Tama avoids it while moving relatively more erratic. Using the chance when Pochi stops moving, Tama successfully hits her with small attack.
Sometimes Tama fails to avoid Pochi's heavy blow, so the damage is comparable.

Still, even though this is a training, aren't they way too serious?
Liza who was washing the dishes volunteered to be the umpire since she was worried with the two.

Even though I've taught them to stop before they hit before the training began, looks like they completely forget about it. Let's tell them again later.

◇

After the meal, I'm taking a break from chanting practice.

Today, I'm experimenting in magic tools creation. What I'm doing now is making preliminary preparations.

Roughly speaking, Magic tools are tools for recreating effects of specific magic without

chanting. Magic circuits are embedded on magic tools as a substitute for the chants. For simple circuits, you could make them without special facility, but you'd need exclusive workshop if you want to make magic tools with complex circuits. It might be easier to understand if I say that it's like the differences between [Miniature bulb and copper-wired battery], and [Electronic circuit with semiconductor].

In order to compose the magic circuit, you need to use circuit liquid to draw specific patterns. Depending on the purpose, you could possibly need circuit liquids with different magic resistance power, but let's go with the orthodox for the first time.

I draw a circle on a wood plank with ink.

Next, I use a pick to lightly carve out the circle.

Then I just need to pour the circuit liquid here and it'd be complete.

I want to make the circuit liquid, but it was written in difficult elf language, it's probably by Trazayuya. It can't be helped, I maximize the elf language skill. I'd have liked if it was written in simpler elf language.

For the making of this circuit liquid this time, you just need to simply mix melted copper with powdered magic core and stabilizer.

First, I melt some coppers. For this I use the magic tool that I've bought from the metal carving workshop. It's a burner where you can raise flame by pouring magic. Burning without fuel, truly a magic tool.

>[Metal Carving Skill Acquired]

Since it looks like I would need this from now on, I put points and activate it.

I mix some powdered magic cores and stabilizers inside the pot where the melted copper is. With light plopping sound, red smoke lightly rises from the pot. It has no smell.

Next, let's pour the circuit liquid into the wood carving. I smell burning woods when I pour the circuit liquid.
Maybe I should have waited until it's a bit cooler.

>[Magic Tools Creation Skill Acquired]

So imbuing was from different category.
Of course I activate it.

"What are you making~."

Arisa who has finished washing the dishes calls me from behind my shoulders.

"A magic tool."
"Eh? Is that something that you could make yourself?"

"Seems so, do you want to try it?"
"Is it fine?"

Arisa pours her magic power, the brown circuit liquid begins to glow vermilion gold.

"Okay, it's good already."
"And, what will happen next?"
"When you put magic power into the circuit liquid, the magic power will flow on it."
"Yep, yep, then?"
"That's it, the magic power goes around, the end."
"Ehh~~~."
"Don't expect grandiose thing from a first timer in magic tools making."

Arisa looks very dissatisfied.
In the first place, I can't make anything else beside circle poured with circuit liquid without special facility, you're expecting too much.

Part 11 - People of Baron Muno Territory (2)

Satou's here. There were some TV programs about survival in uninhabited island or deep in a forest, but I would refuse if I was asked to participate.

I'd eat through all the the nuts and edible plants in a matter of weeks.

◇

"Master, there's someone ahead nodesu."
"There~."

Pochi who's occupying my lap finds traces of someone ahead. I've confirmed it on the map, but I can't see it yet.

"Ah, it went inside the forest."

It seems scout-kun had gone to call its friends.
They're thieves, but this time it's a bit different. They're children ranging from 9 to 14 years old. There are three boys and six girls. Their Reward and Punishments are just [Contract Breach]. Since their titles are [Runaway Slave], they're probably children who have ran away from villages. Their stamina are all less than half.

Indeed, it'd be pitiful to beat them up right?

"What's on there?"
"Group of boys thieves."
"What's that, I'm burning up!"

I consult to Arisa and Liza about their reward and punishment.

"Runaway slaves is it? Then, our reward and punishment won't change even if we kill them, so I think there's no need to worry."

No, Liza-san, I don't have such worry.

"How about ignoring and going through them? Or do you want to get more little girls?"

This is enough, I'll pass on getting more.

"Right huh, runaway slaves probably don't have projectile weapons, let's shake them off."

...It was no good.

◇

Three girls are laying on the road, blocking it. We can't exactly run them over right?
The wagon barely stopped in time just before hitting them, but the girls didn't move even

after that. Since they were not tied, their body might had been frozen in fear. They're too reckless even if they want to stop the wagon no matter what.

"Don't move! We have ten archers aiming at you in the forest."

Strange voice with raised pitch threatened us.
Since it's troublesome to play along with the bluff, I'll put aside the girls and quickly advance the wagon.
I leave the wagon's back entrance to Pochi and Tama to guard, and the driver's seat to Liza.

"If you value your life, leave your food here."

He's making demand with utmost effort, but the back chorus isn't helping.

"I'd like some potatoes."
"Stupid, we have to demand dried meat here! Right?"
"I want to eat bread."
"Anything's good as long as it's not weeds."
"Stupid, you guys keep silent."
"You're the stupid one calling other stupid you know?"
"Just shut your mouth."

The demands became chattering of young children, ruining everything.
I seize one of the small girl who's blocking the road, and gently toss her to the other children in the forest. She's abnormally light. The children who are thrown at are panicking while catching her.

"Uwah, what are you doing!"
"We'd shoot you with arrow."

No one is coming out of the forest.
Do they not have weapons or are they afraid of Liza?

"Do you want to walk to the forest yourself, or get thrown there?"
"J, just run me over. If we don't have food, we'll die starving anyway."

She insists with trembling voice, I'm not sure if she's bluffing or being serious.
She's the same age as Lulu, but she looks as old as Arisa. She's a girl with semi-long red hair and red brown pupils. The arm which I grab to make her stand is thin like a dead branch.

"L, let go of Totona!"

The boy who has been negotiating with us since now comes out of the forest after seeing me grabbing the girl's arm. The red-haired boy looks similar with the girl. He's holding a club on his hand.
I force the girl to stand, and push her toward the boy. The girl stumbles and is caught by the boy.

"Liza, go."

I jump to the driver seat of the wagon which has started running.

"Okay, here."

Arisa holds out a big bag while saying so, and throws that to the forest. The content of that bag is vegetables and food that Tama has gathered like fruits. Since it wasn't prepared in advance, she probably did it when she heard the boys' conversation.

"You're probably thinking that even if I give them food, it won't solve the root of the problem right? When you're starving, you don't think of tomorrow. The most important thing is to quell the starving right now. Just that."

◇

"Is it still bothering you?"
"No, it's not that."

It didn't bother me at all. After taking two deep breaths, the queasy feeling on my stomach completely disappears.
What I have in mind is the things ahead. There's a narrow river ahead of this road, and five old people are there.
They're neither thieves or runaway slaves. Are they fishing?

"Don't think unnecessary things when you're hungry! Let's eat a lot of delicious steaks and cheer up!"
"Cheer~?"
"Eat until full nodesu."

I'm thankful for your worry, but you girls are absolutely thinking about the steak more right?

We've arrived at the creek after a while.
The elderly are just sitting on the bank and staring at the river. I'm thinking of camping near the river, but what do I do about this.

"Good afternoon, the weather is nice today huh."
"Oh, are you a merchant, do you have some businesses with this old man?"
"I'm sorry for disturbing you. When I was stopping by the river to get some water, I saw your figures, so I thought of greeting everyone here."
"That is, quite polite of you. Just think of me like a pebble on the roadside."
"That's right, we don't have anything to do beside staring at the river in sorrow until we're called by the god."
"It's preferable to be called by the god here rather than have our grandchildren be sold."
"We're not welcomed in the village even if we go back."
"If you want to give us foods, I'll accept it anytime you know?"
"Hey, if you eat now, you'll get called by the god late."
"That's right huh."

It seems that they're abandoned here on this river.
You should treasure the elders!

"Don't make such face, it's fine."
"That's right, for the sake of decreasing the mouths needed to be feed, we got out of the village by our own volition."
"Right, if the old people are decreased, girls who sell themselves would probably decrease too."
"Nowadays, merchants weren't buying slaves and the village headman was grumbling."

Since there's no one who would buy their daughters, they sacrifice the elderly now huh.

◇

Since the old people seem to be harmless, I decide to camp slightly away from them. We're located downwind from where they are.
Usually, Pochi and Tama hunt and gather food, Arisa and Mia collect firewoods, Lulu and Liza cook, and Nana helps them cook, but since the old people would likely die faster if we scrouge the plants and animals on this area, I decide to refrain.

"We're not going to look for firewoods or preys today. Liza, I'm sorry, but since I want to treat the old people with foods, I want you to cook more today, I leave you with the food choice."
"I understand, since heavy stuff is impossible for people who're fasting, let's make cereal porridge."
"Need help?"
"We have enough hands, but let's teach you on this occasion! It's not only Mia, Arisa, you too."

Lulu readily accepts Mia's offer, and takes Arisa by hand to the place where the cookwares lay. Arisa resists by saying, "Cooking is my bane~.", but today Lulu is forceful and she keeps pulling her.
Pochi and Tama look around restlessly, so I tell them, "You girls can go ahead and play", but somehow it has became a battle training. Moreover, it's me versus Pochi and Tama.

After the signal, Pochi rushes forward like an arrow.

I smoothly avoid the wooden sword's thrust.

Using that chance, Tama sweeps my feet with her wooden sword, I avoid it by jumping.

I counter by lightly kick Tama's wooden sword.

Tama who loses her wooden sword jumps at me while making small growl.

I change her trajectory by scooping her stomach with my palm, and gently throw her away.

While eluding Pochi's attack twice, I confirm Tama has landed after spinning on the air from

the edge of my vision.

"Can't hit~?"
"Strong nodesu."

The training continues while being like that, and when I purposely get myself caught at the end, it somehow looks like we're flirting.

"I caught you, hamumunyanoresu."
"Nihehe~ caught~?"

And then, the last punchline has to come from Arisa after all.

"I'll join in too~."

While saying so, Arisa jumps at me, but--

"Arisa~ Joining~."
"The next prey is Arisa nano desu!"

--Pochi and Tama brilliantly intercept her.

Part 12 - People of Baron Muno Territory (3)

Satou's here. Scene of people crying while eating their meal is a wartime or post-war time tale, but if I have to say, that only reminds me of the time when I'm consoling a broken-hearted friend who went into binge eating, Satou's.

◇

"Gramps, we got some foods."
"It's not weeds today~."

The children whom we meet in the afternoon come storming in when we're eating cereals, vegetables and wolf meat together with the old people. I've heard about these children from the old people, but since they don't know when they'll come back, we've started our meal ahead of them.

"Ah, it's the people from earlier."
"Did they come to get the food back?"
"They're waiting for us."

The children hide anxiously behind the leader's back.
Do these children not see the peaceful atmosphere of this meal?

"We have lots of porridge, why don't you eat with us?"
"That's right, you children eat too."
"Hey now, quickly sit down kids."

The children are cautious with my invitation, but since the gramps are also calling them, and above all, they're captivated with the presented porridge, before long they've joined the meal with us.

"T, tasty."
"It's not weeds?"
"Uwah, there's something smelling nice."
"There are boiled meat here."
"You're lying?"
"It's true, it's meat~."
"Really delicious.... Uuuu"

It's good that you're delighted, but please stop being moved to tears.

Pochi who has finished her plate the fastest starts the war with few words.

"Another please~ nano desu!"

With those few words, the tension is raised on the children.
Probably only feeling that tension subtly, or maybe none at all, the always expressionless

Nana asks for another serving.

"You kids don't need to be reserved. Go eat more."
"We still have a lot, so if you want another helping, you can ask without reserve."

They're cheering after hearing Arisa's words, leaving my words unfinished. The children's eating speed becomes faster. The old people scold the boys who choke their food, "Chew your food well."

Since it looks like the food will not be enough, I go back to the wagon to boil potatoes.
I peel about 20 potatoes and boil them together with Lulu who has came to help. Hearing rustling sounds, I see to the side to find Mia.

"Satou."
"You also want another helping, Mia?"

Mia shakes her head lightly.

"Humans... why."

She tries hard to put words together.

"Throwing away... children... elders?"

When I ask her in detail, seems that the elves cherish their children and elders, so she's shocked with this situation.
Let's leave this kind of heavy topic to Arisa-sensei.

"Have you asked Arisa?"
"Nn."
"What did she say?"
"I don't understand. Things like the riches and the poor, or social structure."

Dang Arisa, don't use difficult words to muddle your way.

"Mia, races that produce a lot of children, not just humans, are fundamentally weak."
"Nn."
"Since they're weak they struggle hard, and will save oneself even at the expense of many."
"All of them?"
"Yep, since they can't all be saved, they let one section becomes sacrifice."
"...That so."

It's good if she's convinced with that, but I myself haven't put much thought in it. Even most of the talks from just before were nothing more than informations I got from net and TV.

"If someone like master becomes a king, it would be really peaceful."

Lulu says so while smiling, but she's overestimating me. If someone like me become a king,

the whole country would immediately go bankrupt, the end.

◇

"Hou, I was wondering why she wore hood during the meal, she was an elf huh."

An old woman comes to here alone. Mia quickly cover herself with the hood even though it's too late.

"She's shy around people."
"Is that so, young lady, I won't tell others so please forgive me."
"Nn."

Mia nods, and lightly runs behind Lulu's back who's keeping the pot.

"Did I get myself hated?"
"She's just shy. Rather than that, is there anything wrong?"
"It's painful to only accept your kindness and eat, so I'm thinking if there's anything I can help."
"Since we've just began boiling more potatoes, we have enough hands."
"I thought that you were just about to tidy up, is it fine? I don't have anything to pay you back even after you treat us this much."
"It's just a simple whim of mine, please don't mind it."

The old woman looks lost for a moment, but as if she's decided on something, she continues her words.

"Merchant-san, won't you make those children your slaves?"
"I'm sorry old woman, I have enough slaves already, I don't need anymore than these."
"One or two of them is fine, please take them. If they're left alone here, they would die from starvation sooner or later. I don't mind if it's old bones like me, but it's painful to see the children pass away."

I'm sorry for the old woman, but I refuse.
To be frank, journeying in this world is too dangerous. If I need to protect just Lulu and Nana then I could do something about it, but if the people who need to be protected increase by the nine kids over there, I won't be able to.
To calm my heart, I put aside the food for a bit.

"It'd be good if the children could grow their own vegetables isn't it."
"That's right, it'd be nice if there's a field where we could grow vegetables."
"Is the ground around here not good?"
"The sun's exposure is good, but the soil is too brittle, so it's no good."

Mia is listening to Lulu's and the old woman's conversation without doing anything, but then she pulls my sleeve.

"What is it?"

"Forest."
"Yup, it's forest alright."

Seemingly annoyed with my reply, Mia pouts.

"No, humus."

What'd you say, you can use leaves from where rhinoceros beetles live

"They're good."
"Come to think of it, Arisa said something about that too."
"Is it about agricultural reform?"

Yes, that. If I'm not mistaken, she said that an outbreak of large quantity of insect monsters happened.

"Insect monsters?"
"Yep, Arisa said that large quantity of it were springing out when she tried it."
"No, superstition."
"Is that so."
"Lia said so."

Lia? Isn't she Mia's mother?

"In other words, we should clear the forest and cultivate farming land there?"
"Nn."
"That's nice, if we could do that, then the children and us would work hard on it."

The old woman is saying that but she doesn't look to be serious. If we have heavy machineries, then clearing the land wouldn't be hard at all, but of course there is no such thing. Even if we successfully cultivate the land, they could only harvest after 1 year while suffering during that period.

"Right, there are crops which could be harvested fast, but only Gabo could in this season. That one could be harvested in one month. Although, anyone but the nobles in their manor is prohibited in cultivating plants, so we can't acquire the seeds."

The old woman has experience in cultivating Gabo fruit when she was forced to work in a manor.

"That thing can grow disgustingly fast. That's why it's classified as a weed."

They just need to have enough food until spring, is there really nothing we can do?

"If there's such method, we old bones wouldn't get thrown out of the village."
"I don't mind even if it's absurd."
"Right, then we could go hunt the spider bear in the forest. If we have just three spider bear bosses' meat and smoke them, we could live leisurely until spring."

It's a monster living deep in various places of this forest. There are 5 monsters with level around 24-28.

Still, is it a bear or a spider, be firm about it.

"Don't seriously think of going okay? I know that your slave girls are strong, but they won't win against the spider bear inside the forest. When I was a child, there was subjugation expedition with the knights, samurai and soldiers leading the way, no one came back."

Rather than the problem with fighting inside the forest, I think it's simply because of level difference.

"If little elf lady here grows up, with the forest magic from the fairy tale, she could move with ease along the large trees and help farm the land in the forest."
"Muu."

Mia is sulking after being treated as a child.

"Old woman, even though this girl looks like this, she's older than you."
"Oya oya, is that so. Elves sure have long life."

Mia's mood isn't recovering, but when the old woman blows leaf flute to soothe her, she looks interested on it.
Since Mia is also coming from forest, she has blown various leaves flutes there, so her musical timbre and power of expression are world apart from the old woman even though they use the same leaf. This might unexpectedly be the result of study in her long life.

Everyone gathered around Mia before I'm aware, but then Mia stops and the leading role changes to the potatoes. In the end, it was not enough with just potatoes, and we ended up cooking cereal and porridge once more.

Part 13 - People of Baron Muno Territory (4)

Satou's here. There's saying that there's a great difference between seeing and hearing, but I think there are a lot of things you don't know until you actually try for yourself, Satou.

◇

"U, umm, thank you for the delicious meal."
"You don't have to mind it, everyone has thanked me earlier too."
"Also umm, I'm sorry for the afternoon."

It's the red-haired girl from the afternoon. She's called Totono if I'm not mistaken. She's personally coming to our camping ground to meet me, does she have some business?

The girl is looking downcast, but after she glances a bit at Lulu, her face becomes determined.
She grasps her skirt with trembling hands, and seemingly decides something.

It can't be another, "Please buy me.", situation right.
To be frank, I'm fed up with that.

However, the girl's action is a bit different.
She takes her skirt off. I've said skirt, but her clothes is a one piece, so I could see her ribs--

--or I should be, but Lulu covers her with an apron in a hurry from behind, so I couldn't see it. Let's leave this as it is.
It doesn't seem like she'd wear her clothes back, but she also doesn't brush off the apron.

"T, this is an apology and thanks. We can't do anything, so..."
"You'd pay with your body?"
"Un, my big sister said, 'If you're given something, give something back.', she said that it's no good with just words..."

I don't think that person meant it like this when she said that.

"It's fine to return a thank you to wealthy people. Although I'd like it if you don't take it for granted."
"But"
"Your sister surely meant to say that when you've become a person who lives her life to the fullest, you should share something with other."
"I, is that how it is..."

Since she falls silent, Lulu helps her wear the clothes. I don't have any interest with little girl's body of course, so I avert my gaze.
After Totona has put her clothes on, Lulu invites her to drink a tea. Mia who should have been on watch duty with me is leaning on my back, sleeping. Sleeping even during this uproar, this girl is not fit to be on guard duty.

"Um, this is?"
"It's a blue tea."
"Is it fine to drink it?"
"It's delicious you know."

With Lulu's words, Totona concentrates on the cup while looking awfully surprised. Her cheeks loosens, I wonder if she finds it delicious.
I'm watching that scene while preparing Liza's spear.

"This the first time I've drank something like this."
"Maybe no one drinks it around here. It's master's favorite tea."

It's probably something that only wealthy people could enjoy considering this area.
This tea's name is [Blue Ruby], it's easy to drink like Darjeeling, although they're completely on different level. The tea lets out slightly bluish color when freshly brewed, but it looks like a normal tea when it's cool. I can't help but become curious with how it works.
Totona seems to have calmed down after she has finished drinking the tea.

Since it looks like she's going to try to sell herself this time, let's get ahead of her.

"Totona, won't you lend me strong kids for helping me this morning?"
"Un, if we could thank you with that, everyone will go."
"I'm counting on you, I promise to give two big bags of potatoes to the elders. You guys also need it to survive right?"
"Un, un, thank you, Onii-san."

Totona is saying thank you while crying, Lulu wipes her tears.

Although, two big bag of potatoes are probably not enough for even half a month.
I don't have obligation or reason to help them further than this, but I'll try to do something without giving me trouble. That line of thinking is hypocritical huh.

◇

Right now, I'm away from the camping ground, deep in the forest.
At first, I've thought of hunting the spider bears for the children and elders, but I change my mind and check the forest's terrain.

The old woman said that a good place should be beside a river with a lot of humus and well-lit.
I use a holy sword taken out from storage to briskly cut the trees and put them inside the storage. Since the trees are cut down without any resistance, and I instantly put the fallen tree inside the storage, it doesn't feel real. I've cleared 300 meters wide area in 10 minutes.

I did it without lumbering skill somehow.

The outlook has became much better.

Next, I activate Cultivation skill I've acquired before.
I pull the stumps one by one, but this is quite difficult. I can pull the stump easily, but the reaction force makes my feet sink into the soft ground.
Therefore, I give up on pulling the stump, instead I cut away the root with the holy sword after I raise it. This work took more time than I expected, around 1 hours.

Next, it's the removal of weeds and bushes. Since the weeds break apart when I pull them with all my strength, halfway through, I delicately control my power with difficulty. I got, [Gathering], skill when I was pulling the weeds. It seems that there are some herbs mixed in with the weeds I've pulled. Is this the difference (effect) of [Mowing] skill.

I'd have loved to use fire magic and shout, "Mow it down."[1]

When I've finished removing the weeds, I pull the remaining tree roots. It feels strange like pulling string buried in the ground. This is also the same with the weeds, they break easily if I pull with force, so I have to control my power delicately.

I found some huge rocks and stones halfway through, I put them inside the storage. They'd become hindrances for the field.

Now then, I guess the land is good enough for cultivation?

I feel like I'm missing something, I wonder if this is an effect of Cultivation skill.
I haven't read much manga about cultivation.

Since I don't know what is it even if I stare at the ground, I take out a hoe from the abandoned village back then and try to plow the land.

"Hum~m, it's normal."

After plowing for 10 meter, I feel like hitting something hard.
There is a stone in the ground. The stone is about as big as a fist. Afterward, I hit stones whenever I plow for a bit. The edge of the hoe becomes slightly bent.

I adjust the search range of the map and search for stones. First, let's display the ones in 30 cm deep underground. There's a lot of them. I activate gathering skill to the maximum and begin gathering the stones. I gather the stones so fast that it's as if I'm in a gag manga. Sometimes things that look like gemstones or raw ores are mixed in, but they're probably just beautiful stones like the actinolite back then.

After I've roughly completed the removal of the stones, I try plowing the ground. Since I've only did this once when I was a child on my grandpa's countryside, I don't know if I'm doing this right. If I just make the ground soft enough, then the old men could probably direct the children well.

I pile up about 10% of the weeds that I've gathered at the edge of the farmland. It'll be usable for fertilizer.
I also clean off branches from 10 felled tress and pile them on three different locations.

Then I cut them into 20 parts in easy to use sizes.
I wrap gabo fruits with cloth and put them below the timbers. It shouldn't get damaged by beasts like this.

"Fuh, it's tiring after all."

My stamina has been decreased by 20%. The stones removal was the most severe.

"Now then, I've reclaimed the land, but what should I do about it."

Yes, it'd look unnatural for workable fields to materialize in one night.
I'll leave this alone, and hope that the children would find the place when they're looking for food. Since it's only 2 kilometers away and near the river, I'm expecting them to find it.

At that time, a spider bear that the old woman were talking about during dinner comes out of the forest.

It's coming to get itself hunted, what a laudable monster.

◇

About this spider bear, it's a spider with the body portion looking like bear's. To be frank, it's disgusting.

There are 5 spider bears which appear, I lure them back into the forest. I could eliminate them now, but since I have some things in mind, I'm going to take one monster back to the camping ground. First, I obliterate four monsters soundlessly and put them into the storage.

The remaining one monster is chasing my back without even realizing that its friends have all disappeared.

In accordance with crisis perception, I leap to the side.

Thus I evaded an attack from the spider bear's claw which had its body hanging upside down like a pendulum. Seems that the spider is hanging by using its thread on a big tree.
The spider which has reached the top of the pendulum separates from the thread and makes a landing ahead. The tree behind which has been used as the fulcrum is breaking apart.

The spider bear ahead lifts its forelegs making a threatening pose, I kick it while being careful as not to kill it.

I run past it to the highway.
The spider bear comes out of the forest a bit later. Since it'd be troubling if it loses sight of me, I throw a big lumber at it while purposely missing.

I dash to the camping ground and call Pochi and the girls who are on guard duty.
I'm planning to raise everyone's level while procuring food, killing two birds with one stone.

"Pochi, Tama, get ready for battle. Nana, after you hit the monster with Magic Arrow, wake

Liza and Arisa up."
"Enemy~?"
"Yes, master."

The spider bear lost a bit of its HP from the magic arrow unleashed by Nana. It could cause damage even with so much level difference huh, this magic arrow is quite an excellent magic.

With a short cane to cast Shield, I stop the spider bear.
The spider bear tries to reach behind the shield with its long leg, but Tama prevents it with her stiletto.

"Thank you, Tama."
"Nou puroburemu~?"

Pochi is going at the spider bear from its behind diagonally, she thrusts at the leg joint with her stiletto. Seems that she hits it, but the attack is unable to break the joint.

A red light pierce through the monster's body from the opposite side.
The spider bear loses 10% of its HP with that one blow from Liza. It seems she wakes up in hurry since she's only wearing something that looks like long t-shirt without armor.

The spider bear changes its target to Liza. I must attract the monster's attention.

"Over here, you spider thingy!"

I provoke the spider bear while hitting it with the shield. Is this what they call shield bash? Its HP decreases. Oh no, it'd die before Arisa and Mia come out.

>[Provocation Skill Acquired]

I immediately activate Provocation skill. After that the battle becomes a cinch. After all, the hardest attack of the enemy is only coming at me obstinately.

With this skill, it should be easy in the labyrinth.

After Arisa and Mia who come out late unleash their magic, it becomes a one-sided battle of the beastkin girls.
Since we're fighting near the camping ground, the old people and the children who have woken up are watching from a distance. The children raise their voice whenever Mia use her magic or Liza's spear lit up.

At last, the spider bear lays down and stops moving after receiving Liza's attack, raising conspicuously loud cheers from the children and the old people.

Part 14 - People of Baron Muno Territory (5)

Satou's here. When I went to the countryside during my childhood, I played by the riverside a lot. I remember keeping beautiful stones like they were treasures. Right now, I wonder if they're still being kept in the closet of my parent's house along with my memories.

◇

"Liza, I'm counting on you for the recovery of the magic core. You can leave everything beside the magic core as it is."
"Yes, master."

First thing first, I hand a dagger to Liza who holds nothing but her spear and ask for the recovery.

"Wait a minute, you went alone to do some dangerous things weren't you."
"Since I wasn't able to sleep, I went to gather some herbs and got attacked."
"Didn't I tell you not to go alone? Even though you've got shield skill, you could still easily die if you're careless!"

After apologizing to Arisa who has teary eyes, I face toward the old people who are looking at us from afar.

"I'm sorry for the disturbance in the middle of the night."
"We don't mind it, but is that monster a spider bear?"
"Yes, it's a spider bear you've mentioned in the afternoon, it might be a stray who've lost its way."
"Your luck were bad huh, it usually only gets to human habitation once in every few decades. This is the first time, I've seen one in my life."
"Is that how it is, it could have been dangerous if our capable girls didn't do their best."

Maybe it came out because their prey were hunted to exhaustion by human?
I thought that they appeared this time because of the land reclamation, but they were originally monsters which didn't get close to human habitation huh. If I didn't reclaim the land, these people might became victims someday.

"Say, is the one with red light a magic weapon?"
"Those onee-chan were using magic~."
"What are you saying, that person's shield is made with magic!"
"It did block all the monster's attacks~."
"But, even that red spear was BOOM, like that."
"I'll become a spear when I grow up."
"It was amazing right, like VROOM."

The attack from Liza's spear during midnight is really eye-catching. The children who notice Mia's and my magic are only a few. Still, little girl, what do you mean by becoming a spear.

"I thought you were a merchant, turned out you were a magician huh."
"I'm only a beginner on both, leaving that aside, about this spider bear, I don't need anything else besides the magic core, so everyone can get the meat or the fur."
"That's the best thing I could ask for, but is it fine? If you take it to the town, you could sell it for high price you know?"
"It's troublesome to carry something that big."

The elders who are hesitating decide on it after this words from Arisa.

"Old man, you don't need to hesitate. Rather than trying to keep some queer appearance, it's your top priority to ensure tomorrow's food!"
"You're right. Then, I'll accept it with gratitude."

We leave the spider bear body while the blood is draining out, it will be dismantled tomorrow.
Next, I'm praying that while they're surviving with this monster's meat, they would discover the farm land.

◇

"Onii-chan, this is, thank you."

A little girl who comes together with Totona gives me a small bag with a lot of pebbles inside. The pebbles are beautiful stones seemed to have been picked from the riverside. This must be this little girl's treasure. I'm okay with this kind of normal gratitude.
I pick one and return the rest to her.

"I'll only pick this one, you should treasure the rest."
"Un."

The little girl bashfully hides behind Totona.

Cheers are raised at the place where the spider bear body is hung. It seems Liza has started the dismantling.
Since Totona and the girl are fidgeting nervously, I urge them, "Go take a look at it."

The thing that I got is an opaque red pebble. I didn't pick the most beautiful pebble, but when I appraised it, [Snake Blood Stone] was shown. Where does the snake come from.
Since this stone is one of the ingredients for [Antidote: All-Purpose], this might be a lucky find. I check on the riverside at the reclaimed land, it turns out there are a lot of the same stones there.

There's still time before breakfast, I guess I'll go pick them. Today, the breakfast is being handled by Lulu, Nana and Arisa. Lulu strives to teach Arisa how to cook.

"Mia, I want to take a walk along the river, do you want to go together?"
"Nn."

I invite Mia who has just came back from washing her hair and body with hot water. I wonder if the scolding from Lulu works well, recently, she's not loitering around when she's nude.
Mia hands me a towel and makes me dry her hair. Arisa shouts, "You're too sweet with Mia! Dry my hair too please~.", from afar, she's the same as always. Didn't I dry it just the other day?

I go toward the opposite of the river by jumping across stones that are scattered around on the shallow water.

"Satou, hand."

Since the gap is a bit wide among the scattered stones, Mia extends her hands and I catch them to pull her.
Maybe I used too much force, Mia fell on my chest. If Arisa sees this, she'd likely say something again.

While picking up the intended stones on the riverside, I gaze at the river. Taking a stroll while listening to Mia's leaf flute play, this is truly an extravagant time. Yup, really calming.

"There's no fish."

Mia who were looking at the river while playing the leaf flute, muttered so. There isn't even shadow of fish in this river. Not even other aquatic organisms like crabs in the riverside exist. They were probably caught by Totona and the other and the neighboring villagers.

"It seems there are some birds."

The smaller birds seem to have cleverly survive. I continue picking the stones while we take a break.
We're enjoying the quiet stroll until Pochi calls us.

It was a bit hard to stop Pochi who came and tried to jump in the river since she wasn't able to cross the stones. Thanks to that, the languid atmosphere completely disappears. As expected of Pochi.

◇

It has been two days since we left the old people and the children. We've meet thieves three times already, but we only left them half-killed since they were just common ordinary thieves. It has just been thrice, but I feel that the thieves' equipments are too good here. Back then thieves were using things like bow and arrow, woodman's hatchet, and daggers which can be said to be tools for everyday life, yet in this three occasions, they were using equipments like straight sword made from properly casted bronze. Furthermore, the leader-looking man even had breastplate and shield made with metal.

Although, even if the thieves had better equipments, they're still nothing against the beastkin girls. They were easily defeated without the girls even breaking a sweat.

"Master, a carriage~."

Tama who sits on top of me driving the wagon points at a meadow with her left hand. I can't see it since Tama rests her feet on my shoulder. Since it can't be helped, I turn my whole body to look there. One part of the carriage is peeking through the meadow. There's no one around there according to the radar.
It's probably a victim of thieves. I should make them some graves, but since I don't want to see gruesome spot, I decide to ignore it.

"I wonder if it was attacked by thieves."
"It probably is."
"Thieves should be beaten back nano desu!"
"Beaten back~."

Arisa and Pochi who were piqued with Tama's voice appeared from the back. I'll overlook her for casually holding my arms, but since her hand is reaching to my thigh, I take a poking stance.

"Master, I'll return this book, so please lend me nature magic book next~."

Arisa who protect her forehead changes the subject while lightly glares at me, I receive the book.
I put the book into the bag, take out the nature magic book from there, and give it to Arisa. By the way, it's not from the storage. Since I got advanced magic books from Trazayuya, I put the introductory books I got from Seryuu city that Arisa gave back into the bag and left it there. I usually use it as a substitute for pillow.

As for the literacy rate, everyone has became able to read the 100 pieces of learning cards. Only Arisa and Nana are at the level where they can read books. It seems Nana has been able to read characters since the day she was made. Lulu and Mia can read simple picture books. Everyone sure learns fast.
Pochi and Tama are stuck with the difference between written and spoken language, so they can't read well. Since they've became able to read numbers, I'll teach them arithmetic next time.

"Master, this schedule, what is it?"

She shows me a paper taken from the nature magic book. It's the paper I've bought from flea market that was worth 100 gold coins.
I took a look at it during a break before, but it was just a paper mostly composed of date and schedule. It's interesting that the schedule look like it's printed, but since sometimes there are scribbles with random line and numerics drawn like spiderweb, I can't see its worth. So I thought that it might have some secret, and tried doing various things like looking at sun through it, but then I neglected it.

"Biopsy?"

Arisa said so while looking at the paper.

"There's nothing like that written there right?"
"If you read it vertically, that's what it says you know?"

Vertical reading? There's something like bulletin board even in this another world huh.
When I look at the paper, it surely reads that.
I put the paper into the storage, sort it by date, and read it in turn. I see, it's certainly possible to be worth 100 gold coins.

"Arisa, you're great!"
"Fufun, if you want to praise me then I'd like you to show it in your attitude~."

I leave the reins to Tama, and hug Arisa. "Uwaah, so sudden, nnnoo~", she's letting out weird sounds, but well, it's fine.

I want to read the content of that paper in detail, but since we're going to encounter thieves in about two hours today, I leave it for later. The thieves this time is a group of 30 people.
Furthermore, there are four people from the knights of baron Muno territory heading here from that direction.

The thieves should be able to easily defeat those knights, but they don't look like they're going to attack the knights, I wonder if they don't want to fight knights even though they have advantage in number. The knights also seem like they don't notice the thieves, they're going straight here. Just in case, I arrange Liza to protect the wagon's rear, and Pochi and Tama to guard the front.

"The merchant over there, stop. The great me is a senior knight of baron Muno, Elal."
"Well well, knight-sama, nice to meet you, I am Satou, a merchant."

Since I don't know the exact etiquette, I go down the wagon and bow.

>[Etiquette Skill Acquired]

...was my etiquette until today not enough, or was it wrong--Let's not pursue the reason too much.

"Did you see any luxurious-looking noble-riding carriage? Or did you see a beautiful woman riding a white horse?"
"I came from earl Kuhanou territory, but I didn't see anything that look like that carriage or that person. I did see a carriage that looks like it had been used by merchants in a meadow just beyond this."
"You have no lie in that words right?"
"Yes, of course. Trust is the most important thing for merchants after all."

The knight is threatening me by gripping the handle of his sword, I calmly answer back. It's nothing compared to Liza's spear.

"Alright, sir Bezz, Sir Donoza, you check that carriage and then deliver the order to the guards at the border just in case. We will report back to baron."

The knights parted in two group and went away without even thanking for the information. It looks like the thieves are attacking the knights, maybe they find the decrease in number to be a good chance.

They're not people I'd want to save, but since the thieves are already lured out, let's accept this opportunity.

Part 15 - People of Baron Muno Territory (6)

Satou's here. When I tried western games for the first time, I was surprised how easily it was taking away other people's life. It's cute to call it culture gap, but it can't be taken lightly in parallel world.

◇

Seems that the thieves toppled the knights with ropes and casting net, and attacked them. When the knights come into our view, they're desperately struggling to fight back from inside the net. The net looks easy to cut with sword, are they amateurs?

The thieves are also frantically attacking them, but since the knights are wearing full body armor, the attacks aren't quite getting through.

Since there are only three archers of the thieves, Pochi and me split up to take them down from the trees. I wonder why they're always on the tree. It's a mystery.

The thieves who have noticed us are coming toward us, but they've already been reduced by half when they're around 200 meters before us. Mia attacked with Mustard Mist, and the thieves who were coughing in fit got quickly incapacitated by the beastkin girls. Nobody seems to have died for the time being.
I leave the wagon to Lulu, and ask Nana whom I've casted with Shield to protect her.

I also use Shield on myself and head toward the battlefield along with the beastkin girls.
I cut the net restraining the knights with a dagger while the beastkin girls are keeping the thieves company.

"You did well, merchant! You damnable thieves, became prey for the great senior knight Eral-sama's strong sword!"
After the other knight silently nods, he follows the knight Eral, and they raise bloodbath with the thieves. Even though the two are only level 9, their equipments and battle skills are far apart, so it becomes one-sided slaughter. They make sure to kill the thieves who are lying on the ground after they've been neutralized by Liza and the others . They're really merciless.

"Oops, sir knight, stop right there."

A bearded daruma who seemed to be the thieves' leader came out of the forest. The minion on his side is holding a woman in traveling clothes hostage. The woman is tied with a rope.

"Hum, a hostage huh."

What's this, my crisis perception is terribly warning me. Is there an ambush somewhere? I keep my attention on the surrounding.

No.

It's coming from the knight Eral.

The knight Eral is going to stab the hostage woman together with the man behind her, I throw the dagger on my hand to repel his sword.

Fuh, I made it.

While confirming the safety of the woman, I avoid the blade of a thief who attacks from behind. It seems the knight Eral can't determine if he should attack me or the thieves.

Jeers are coming from the bearded daruma.

"Ceh, you don't care with hostages huh, are you really a knight?"

The bearded daruma, a thief, is more of a humanism than the knight...
The bearded daruma ward off the knight Eral's sword with his axe.

The other knight cuts the man who hold the hostage from behind. What's with the knight in this world?

"Toruma!"

That scream comes from the woman who was made hostage. What's this? Is the neutralized man not a thief. The knight who hears the man's name uttered seems to have judged that the woman is also a thief, the taciturn knight raises his sword toward her. I place myself between them, relying on Shield.

"Knight-sama, you're attacking the wrong opponent. This person is not a thief."

I don't know if the taciturn knight believes my word, but he leaves the woman alone.

The knight Eral's battle with the bearded Daruma ended in a flash after the taciturn knight went to help him. The other thieves are going to run when they see that the bearded daruma is going to lose, but Pochi and Tama throw stones at their feet, arresting them.

"You coward."
"Fuhn, fool. It's unthinkable for the honorable knight to fight mere thieves in equal footing. Good grief, they always spring up no matter how many of them we rid of."

After they're finished dealing with the thieves, the knights finish off the ones who are tied with ropes behind the wagon. I can only see this as excessive slaughter. I was going to protest at the knights, but I was stopped by Arisa who had came beside me before I knew it.

"Fuhn, it's a waste of food to let thieves alive. I thank you for your assistance. You can feel honored. I'll leave you with the thieves equipment, it'll be usable for your trade."

The knights went off after leaving words that didn't really feel like gratitude.

By the way Toruma-shi is alive. Since he didn't die instantly, I made him drank a health

potion, and his complexion returned in a blink. This immediate effect is unpleasant even after seeing it so many times. His breath is steady even though he's still unconscious.

Hayuna-san--the name of the woman hostage--tells us that the baby of her and him is being kept in the hiding place of the thieves inside the forest. They couldn't go against the thieves since their baby was made hostage.

I make Hayuna-san who wants to go together to the hideout sleep with Arisa's magic.

◇

Mia, Arisa and me are going to attack the thieves hideout.

I wanted to go to the hideout alone, but Arisa insisted on going together no matter what, and Mia who was feeling sick with the smell of blood took the opportunity, so it was decided that we're going together.

The hideout is only about 100 meters away from the highway. After we make the thieves sleep with Arisa's magic from the outside, we leisurely save Hayuna-san's baby.

"Al~right, baby rescue mission clear!"
"Nn."

I leave the baby to Mia since Arisa is calling me.

"That baby has a gift. It's quite rare."

The baby has an unusual skill, [Oracle].

"What kind of skill is it."
"The skill has the same effect as getting oracle from the gathering of a lot of priests and miko from the temple praying for hours."
"That's convenient."
"However, since you could die if you thoughtlessly use it too much, looks like it can't be abused."

I guess it's like some kind of god's hot channel. I somehow imagine a working salesman holding a cellphone.

"Now then, putting aside the baby, what do we do to these thieves."
"It's probably alright just taking the weapon and armor, and leaving them alone. They probably can't continue thieving business after their friends have been eliminated right?."

There were 3 thieves inside the hideout. I had thought that they were prisoners at first since they all delicate looking men who seemed to have never been in a fight, but their affiliations are the same thieves gang as with the bearded daruma earlier, so it's probably not wrong.

"You're sweet as always eh. Well, it's fine. Still, there are only delicate men huh. I wonder if

they're lovers of the bearded daruma earlier? Since it somehow feels like BL, I'll forgive them."

I don't care with the thieves' preferences or virtues, so I leave the gathering of their equipments to Arisa who's letting her delusion comes out of her mouth.

"Found treasures."

I thought that it was some kind of erotic item since it was coming from Arisa, but it was just a normal necklace.
It has a small jewel that looks like lapis lazuli attached.

"It's an amulet. It's probably a stolen good, but it's quite good of a magic item. I don't know the type though."

The search is over soon, and we've collected not only normal sword, but also armors, daggers, arrows and bows among various things. As for the food stuff, we only take luxurious food like sake.

When I check the map, there's a storehouse hidden within the wall in the boss room. When I check inside it, there are assorted jewelries and money totaling at 5 gold coins, a lot of high-grade liquor, and several ill-matched books.

"Heroes' tales isn't something that a thief should carry. And there's even a love story between a knight and a noble girl..."

Even though he was a bearded daruma, he could read words? If anything, these would probably sell well in shady pawn shop huh.

"Ja ja~n, look at these."
"Good job, Arisa."

Arisa shows me two scrolls wrapped in first-class looking cloth. They're Shelter and Remote Arrow, but unfortunately Shelter has already been used.
It's probably carried by a traveling merchant or a noble for self-protection.

"What, you're only seeing the scrolls? Notice this cloth too~."

I try to appraise it. Looks like it's a kind of magic tool. From what I understand, it's a material called Yuriha fiber which I haven't heard before, it has high defense against physical and magical attacks. If it doesn't have any strange effect, then I'd make something for Lulu from it, even though it was a man's.

"Looks like it has magical properties huh. Since I don't understand the explanation of the special effect, let's put a hold on making equipment from it."
"Uu~n, I wouldn't want if it's cursed and can't be taken off. Even though it's a waste, it can't be helped."

In addition, there are three horses tied in the back of the hideout. I look at the shed nearby, but I can only find one harness for the boss' share. I put the harness to one horse which has the only different breed.

"Ara, they were sure prosperous thieves."
"Looks like it, there's only one harness you know."
"I'll ride."

Mia rides on one of the horse without saddle. Seems that she's used with playing with wild horses in her birthplace.
Learning from Mia, I also mount the horse. Of course it's the horse with saddle. I put my foot on the stirrup and get on in one breath.

>[Horse-riding Skill Acquired]
>[Mount-riding Skill Acquired]

The latter seems to be skill for things besides horses. Since it's pitiful to let only Arisa walks, I put her in front of me. It's fine that you're leaning your head on my chest, but I want you to stop pressing your butt on me. Since Arisa is holding the baby, I'm only warning her, but it'll be punishment time when we get on the wagon. Of course, not in sexual way.

We get to the wagon while holding the baby in the arms, the thieves corpses are lined up on the roadside there. Looks like their equipments have been successfully retrieved.

"Master, I haven't cut the head of the corpses, what should I do?"
"It's fine to leave it alone, there's still two days before the next town, they'd smell bad if we take them."

I definitely do not want to journey with 30 severed heads.

Part 16 - People of Baron Muno Territory (7)

Satou's here. In my childhood, I couldn't help but found magnet which floated because it's meeting another magnet with the same polarity to be mysterious. Magic show was popular back then, so I thought for a while that the floating magnet was magic.

In a parallel world, magnet might be considered to be a magic stone.

◇

The inside of the wagon which usually has a lot of space is now full of luggage.

I make this camouflage in order to prevent Hayuna and the man become suspicious. I lay around cookwares, boxes and barrels containing two days worth of food inside the wagon. Keeping them from collapsing was hard.
During this time, I feel thankful for having Item Box.

Of course I've made sure to leave space just enough for people. Mia complains, "Cramped.", but this is probably still pretty spacious compared to a normal carriage.

As expected, even the indifferent Mia asked, "Where did you take those from?", after this, but I showed her magic bag <<Holding Bag>>.
Putting aside Mia who will part way with us in Bornean forest, I don't mind telling other members about Item Box, but I want to avoid situation where our girls get kidnapped because the rumor floats around, I'd rather the harm comes my way. Of course, I don't think that these girls would spread the rumor, but there's no denying the possibility of someone overhearing them when they're talking between themselves.
It'd be safer to keep this a secret until everyone becomes strong enough to fend themselves even if they get into trouble.

In that respect, if it's magic bag <<Holding Bag>>, then the aim would be the item, so even if it got stolen, it wouldn't be particularly troubling.

◇

"Should we wake them soon?"
"Right, let's leave them alone until the next camp. If they're weird people, let's leave them before we get to Muno city."
"Okay."

For the time being, we're not going to encounter thieves or beasts, so I leave the driving to Lulu. Liza is training horse riding. Mia is on her side, she teaches Liza how to handle a horse. Of course, Liza is riding the horse with saddle.

"Master, I want to touch the cheeks of this young organism. I request permission."
"Don't touch the baby."
"I appeal for reconsideration, master."

Nana fixes her eyes on the baby while asking, but it's NG to touch the baby without the guardian's permission.
When I prohibit it, she strongly turns her face toward me in protest.
Her impact is reminiscent of horror, so let's postpone the problem.

"Let's ask for permission when the mother wakes up."
"Master, I request permission to stimulate the wakening of the mother."
"No, don't wake her until she naturally does."
"...Yes, master."

Nana consents while looking a bit sorrowful, but when she looks at the baby, she sits on the floor, hugging her knees, and she puts her chin on her kneecap while looking ecstatically at the baby.
Arisa is not here, she's with Lulu on the driver's stand. It seems she doesn't want to be near Toruma with his sweaty smell.
Pochi and Tama look quite interested with the baby, but they don't get close to her. The two seem to be a bit gloomy somehow, I wonder if they're not good with babies?
When I asked what's wrong, they only answered back with, "It's nothing nodesu."
It doesn't look like nothing at all, so I'll got talk to them after the meal later. When you're full, you'd feel better, and your worries would become lighter.

◇

Pochi and Tama who have been looking down earlier rush off in high spirit after we get to the camping ground while saying, "We will hunt big prey today nodesu." Do they want to show off to the baby?

Arisa and Mia are going to gather firewoods.

"Arisa, the long cane would be a hindrance when you're gathering firewoods."
"I want to test some new magic, it's hard to use new magic for the first time with a short cane you know."
"Finally huh, what kind of magic have you decided to learn?"
"I'm still undecided. I've narrowed my pick to three magic, so I thought of picking one after trying them. Since it's a wasteland beyond that cliff, I won't set the forest in fire even if I fail at it right?"
"It's alright." <Mia>
"Even if it burns, Mia will extinguish it she said."
"Leave it to me."
"Be careful not to get Pochi and Tama caught on it."
"Okay."
"Nn."

I give the permission while feeling exhausted toward Mia who's giving V-sign with her expressionless face. Nah, I guess she's not expressionless, her cheeks look a bit red, she might feels a bit embarrassed.
It seems that she's still minding the failure of magic testing yesterday which had gotten the

camp flooded.

Today's meal are being prepared by Lulu and Nana, I'm going to teach Liza how to take care of the horses. From what I've read in some manga or magazine, you would bond with your horse if you brush it after riding on it. I'm also thinking that Liza should learn horseback for the sake of warding the thieves.

"Liza, are you doing well with the horse riding?"
"Yes, I've done something similar to a mount beast called Lineback back in my hometown."

I could somehow can and cannot imagine the creature from the subtle name. Let's not pursue it.
I tie the horses on the tree nearby and give them some grains and straws. The three of them eat quite heartily. I don't think it's because of hunger since they're not that thin. It might unexpectedly be because of the fodder.

◇

Since we've gotten more horses, I'm thinking of putting them in practical use.

I've thought of putting more pulling horses for the wagon, but I'm worried with the suspension system of this second-hand wagon if it becomes faster. I'm afraid that the axle would break since the road is rough. I've also thought of making suspension, but I don't have the equipment for making large-scale spring, so I give up.

If I could make a magic tool that could replicate the floating magic that the magic shop girl have demonstrated, our transportation capability would go up. It'd be like a linear motor somehow.
There is a method to make magic tools that could reproduce similar magic inside the books from Trazayuya, but since it needs large-scale facility and nature magic user, it's unreachable. It looks like the blocks at the maze were moving by using the same principle.

In the end, all the three horses are to become mounts. If the beastkin girls ride on it while armed, it likely would ward off thieves.

First, I decide to try making harnesses for horseback riding. Fortunately I have a lot of leather, so I make them while checking the sewing and cutting method from textbook. I shave woods for the stirrups since it's can't be made with just leather. I have samples, so it's easy.
I've completed it in 30 minutes, and I immediately try putting it on the horse to check the fit. Yup, there doesn't seem to have any problem.
I should make small harnesses for Pochi and Tama.

When I'm taking off the harness, Nana calls for me. Seems Hayuna-san has woken up.

"Thank you very much. You even used magic potion for the sake of Toruma."
"I don't mind it, there's no substitute for human life after all."

Although it was a magic potion, the one I used was the cheapest to make, but that doesn't need to be said.

Hayuna-san takes of her hood while saying thank you. She's a woman with reddish blond hair. She's relatively beautiful, but she doesn't look like a 25 years old with her childish eyes. Even so, she looks like a proper mother as she cuddle the baby. Her breast are larger than most, but she couldn't be called "Kyonyuu", though her waist lines are nice. Her level is 3, she has [Cleaning] skill.

The man who's sleeping beside her, Toruma-shi, is a 30 year man with unreliable looking impression due to his tall and thin figure. His hair is light brown, no beard. His level is 4, he has [Social] skill.

When I'm having a quiet friendly chat with Hayuna-san, Arisa sits beside and asks me in whisper with anxious-looking face. She's wearing her hood, probably because Hayuna-san and the man are here today. Her hair which could be peeked from the hood looks to be golden-colored. Since she isn't going through some kind of awakening, it's probably a wig or magic.

"You don't have interest with married women right?"
"I don't, adultery is fruitless."
"T, that's right huh! You understand don't you."

I face toward Hayuna-san since it's rude to talk in private.

"It looks like you're going on a journey, where are you heading?"
"Yes, we were eloping, but we had been forgiven by the parent's house, so we were going back to the capital city of the dukedom."

Isn't eloping a word you'd want to hide?
Oh yes, this Toruma-shi, is a nephew of the duke. Arisa shouted, "Template, *kita*", when she looked at this person. I was glad that it happened when they were sleeping.

"Ufufu, you guys are really intimate."
"Today, they're strangely attached."

Hayuna-san is smiling while looking at us. Arisa and Mia are sitting on my sides since some times ago for some reason. At first, it was only Arisa, but midway, Mia imitated Arisa and also joined. What are you girls plotting.

The chat with Hayuna-san moves to when she was caught by the thieves. Apparently, they were captured three days ago.

"Yes, I didn't think that we would be alive. The merchant who was driving was killed and the five mercenaries we hired as escort escaped as soon as they saw the thieves."
"That was harsh. Even though the thieves number was a lot, the ones in this area aren't that strong."
"We disparaged the mercenaries, 'Betrayers', many times at that time, but it was too

reckless to challenge dozens of opponents... "

Normally you wouldn't know how strong your opponent is until you fight, so I guess it can't be helped. It would look like you'd lose against armed people double your number.

"Even so, it's good that you come out safe."
"Yes, Toruma used a self-protection scroll to cast magic."
"Hoo, that's amazing. What kind of magic was it?"
"It was really amazing, after the magic was used, wall of light appeared covering the carriage, the thieves weren't able to get close."

So the one that Toruma-shi had used huh was the Shelter scroll from the thieves' hideout. That means, the Remote Arrow scroll that came together with it might also be Toruma-shi's belonging. Although I don't intend to give it back in the first place. According to Arisa and Liza, the things taken from thieves elimination are to be divided to the people who participate on the elimination. In this case, it's fine officially too since the knights have given the permission.

"Did you not escape after you put up the wall of light?"
"The magic didn't allow us to escape from that place, so it became a staring contest with the thieves for two hours."

Naturally, that would make you feel more dead than alive. During that time, they survived after they frantically persuade the thieves, "You can get ransom money." They were forced to became hostages since the opponents were knights at that time.

"Ransom money is it?"
"Yes, Toruma's parents are noble, so Toruma wrote letter asking for ransom and gave it to the thieves along with his ID."

I see, so the luggage only contains Hayuna-san ID.

"That reminds me, when you were held hostage, you didn't call for help to the knights?"
"The thieves threatened to kill our daughter if we uttered even a word."

However, I don't understand why they brought Toruma-shi along. They should made the delicate men in the hideout to do it. Well, whatever.
When we're having that talk, Toruma-shi wakes up.

"Ha, Hayuna!"
"Toruma, you've woken up. It's alright now. Look, Mayuna is also safe."
"I'm so glad, I'm so glad, Hayuna, Mayuna."

I have to say, please give more thought for your child's name.
Their reunion scene continues until Hayuna-san's baby bursts out crying.

Part 17 - People of Baron Muno Territory (8)

Satou's here. During the time when I was working, I've won intense arguments when we had difference for the requested source, but now that I'm living a calm life in this world, I've grown a bit dull.

However, I wonder if living humanly is nothing but illusion for the people who lives in this brutal world.

◇

"Here's the luggage we have recovered from the thieves."
"Oh dear, you even got our luggage on top of helping us."

Hayuna-san says thank you while receiving the luggage. Toruma-shi peeks into the luggage, and asks after hesitating.

"Have you seen a dagger inside the luggage?"
"Those were the only things in the hideout. But there should be many of that from the thieves' belongings."
"It's a dagger with white leather sheath..."
"If it's that one, it was held by the leader-like bearded daruma. Wait a minute."

While saying so, I take out a dagger from the toolbox on the edge of the wagon. Of course, I took it out from the storage. The dagger's shear is relatively simple, but there's a beautiful family crest design placed at one point, it's quite fashionable. The blade is not a magic tool, but it's made from mithril forged by dwarves.

"Is this it?"
"Yes, that's it!"

Toruma-shi who's going to receive the dagger from me is stopped by Arisa's words.

"Wait, that's our appropriate reward for exterminating the thieves. We've even acquired permission from the knights. If you want it, you have to present something with equal value."

"This has a crest of my family engraved. I can't hand it to others."
"So what? You, I know that you're emotional from the reunion, but you haven't even said thank you for the saving right? Moreover, you even have the gall to claim other people's possession?"
"You need to be more polite toward adults."
"Sorry, but that's for when the negotiation is over. During a negotiation, I'll talk in equal term even if the opponent is a king, that's my style."

It really does look like she'd talk in that tone even to a king.

Toruma-shi cannot retort to Arisa's harsh words.
Hayuna-san who's unable to watch this is putting a good word for Toruma-shi.

"Dear, first, please say thank you to them. This person had used expensive magic potion to save the dying you. Furthermore, he protected me from knights and thieves' sword saving my life. On top of that, they sneaked into the dangerous thieves' hideout, and even saved Mayuna. Now, let's tell them words of gratitude."
"You're right Hayuna. I was wrong. Merchant-dono, this Toruma am truly grateful for your kindness."

Toruma couple bow together.

"However, I'd like you to return this dagger no matter what. Of course, I'll give anything I'm able to."

It seems he has recognized that the property right belongs to me, but it's still, "Return it to me.", rather than, "Please give it to me."

"Is anything alright?"
"M, my daughter and wife are off limit."

Toruma-shi frantically covers his wife and daughter. I think it's rude that he covers even my line of sight. Perhaps, he's thinking that I'm a man without honor.
Though I guess it can't be helped if he thinks like that to a person who's journeying together with seven girls of different types.

"Right then, you don't have money or jewelries right?"
"Umu, everything was taken away by the thieves."
"What about magic tools?"
"Those were also taken away by the thieves."

Arisa shrugs exaggeratedly.
She's probably aware of that from the start, but she knows about his connection to the duke--in other words, a nephew of big noble, so she's probably attempting to weasel rewards from his parent's house.

"It's impossible right now, but if we get to the dukedom... no, I'll pay if you let us go with you until the castle of baron Muno."
"What? Are you acquainted with the baron?"
"Yeah, he's my second cousin from my father's side. You, I can't commend your calling, add the 'sama' suffix."

Arisa plainly ignores Toruma-shi's words.

"Then, how much is this dagger worth?"
"It's an important heirloom, so it has never been valued. As a gratitude, I'll give you 5 gold coins."

Arisa glances to me, exchanging looks for a second.
By the way, the dagger's market price is 30 gold coins. The price is extraordinary among non-magic tools. For now let's exaggerate the information I've got from the AR.

"Toruma-san, I've evaluated this dagger just before, with the nicely designed sheath along with the beautiful mithril-made blade forged by the famous dwarven artisan, Dohar-shi, it would not worth less than 30 gold coins."
"If we get it to a connoisseur duke, or other nobles who like to compete for their interest, it could be more expensive right."

Arisa is speaking quite a vicious thing.

"T, that would be troubling. However, even nobles would have hard time raising such large amount of gold coins.
"Right~, since our master doesn't have money problem, you could pay it with non-cash."
"We ran away from house, so even if I go back to my parent's house, I have no great item to give you."
"Oh right, I've heard from your wife that you were using scroll to defend yourself from the thieves right?"
"Yeah, my parent is managing a scroll workshop. When I was leaving my house, I was given many scrolls to protect ourselves."
"Hoo, scroll workshop huh, I'd like to observe it by all mean."
"Yes, If you pay a visit to the capital of the dukedom--Oyugock city, please visit us."

I unintentionally cut myself between the talk, Arisa is glancing at me as if saying, "Don't disturb the negotiation."
Still, scroll workshop huh, if I learn how to make them, I could mass produce them myself. It's probably full of secret, so normally they would refuse a visit, I'm lucky for this.
When Arisa asks the price of scroll, '3-5 silver coins' comes back as the answer.

"Our master is a collector of scrolls. He could chant spell for magic himself, so when we get back to our mansion, he would explain about scrolls like from what age or from which workshop this and that scrolls are to the servants."

Arisa is quite a good talker huh. If I'm a magician then I have no need for scrolls to cast magic, and if I'm a collector then I probably wouldn't resell it. Moreover, he wouldn't give me only the same kind of scrolls.

"Oh, I thought that you were a merchant, turned out you're a magician are you."
"I'm still an amateur who could only use a few magic arts. Rather, I'm more active as a merchant."
"Scrolls distribution is regulated by law, so I can't sell you one if you're going to resell them, but if you're a magician then there's no problem. I'm saying this just to be clear, but it's impossible to sell intermediate magic scrolls as decreed by the army."
"Yes, it's enough with beginner class. However, since I'm a collector, I wouldn't be pleased if you only give me the same type of scrolls, so I prefer that you give various type."
"It might be difficult to find as much as 30 gold coins worth of scrolls with no duplicate, since

we usually only make the well-selling ones of around 20 types, I might have look in the warehouse."
"Ara, we could just ask the people from scroll workshop to make one with the requested spell right."
"Ah, that's right. Of course, it would take several days. Satou-dono, are you fine with that?"
"Yes, the contract is established then."

I nod to Toruma-shi, and is going to give him the dagger, but Arisa stops us again.

"Verbal promise is no good. I'll make a written contract, please put your signature and make an inscription wax from the seal on that dagger's pommel."

Arisa holds out the written contract to Toruma-shi. Written there are, [As compensation for the dagger, Toruma-shi is to pay Satou with scrolls worth 30 gold coins],[The price of the scrolls shall follow its retail price], [The scrolls cannot be duplicate], [If there is not enough variant, Satou will choose beginner spell to be made into scroll], [In case the scroll need to be made, Toruma-shi will be bear the cost for the order], and lastly, [In case of contract breach, Toruma-shi and his family will serve Satou as slaves for 30 years].

"Would you erase this last entry?"

Toruma-shi puts a bitter expression, but Arisa persists.

"No, but, okay then. Is the present head of your parent's house a viscount? Or a baron?
"It's viscount. Viscount Shimen."
"Then how about,『In case of contract breach, in the name of viscount Shimen, Toruma-shi will pay 90 gold coins』, that?"
"90 gold coins?! That's too much."
"Ara, it's just a what if scenario. When you fulfill the contract by giving 30-40 scrolls, that'd be the end of story. Or are you going to give up the dagger?"

Arisa is smiling very badly. She's really enjoying it. Arisa is surely an S. No doubt.

"It can't be helped, the latter is fine."

In the end, after groaning for a while, Toruma-shi signs the contract that Arisa has written. She even prepared a marked copy. In her previous life, I wonder if she worked in the law firm?

◇

"Birds~"
"Prey are few nodesu."

Pochi and Tama brought back two birds about the size of pigeons, and five small eggs. They also brought beech fruits, wild grasses, and edible wild plants inside the bag. I wonder if they were taught by the old people and the children, they brought back more variety of wild grasses. I give appreciation for the two who are dropping their shoulders since they cannot

find many prey. I'm going to boil the eggs and give half for each members.

"All of your slaves look strong."
"Yes, according to the soldier of Seryuu city, they're comparable to senior knights."
"That's amazing. But, if that so, then I could understand how you could exterminate that many thieves."
"That's because there were two real knights with us today."
"Those knights! Are their your acquaintances?"

As expected, even a mild, or rather a weak-willed person would lose their cool when it's about the people who've almost killed him.

"No, it was our first meeting. Seems that they were knights of baron Muno."
"What, they were knights of cousin-dono huh, I can't believe that a knight would go after person from behind even in my wildest dream."
"Yes, they also almost killed the madam."
"Is that true?"
"Yes, it was good that I made it in time."

While we are having that chat, the meal's preparation has finished. We arrange the seating for the meal like usual. Without the large platter, the menu today are fried bird meat with vegetables on individual tureens, potato soup inside the mugs, and two boiled potatoes for each.

"Hoo, these are quite grand."

Toruma-shi licks his lips dropping his cheeks, but it seems he's not pleased with the plates' number.

"Huh? Are you going to let the slaves and servants eat together with the master?"
"Yes, they're my journey companions. We'd deepen our solidarity by eating together. Isn't it also like that in the army?"
"However, what if we catch illness by eating together with slaves."
"Dear, these children are quite clean. We ourselves smell of sweats."

I've never been in an army though.
Toruma-shi looks dissatisfied, but he's convinced by Hayuna-san. I didn't think of it because Zena-san acted like normal, but a noble-related person would not want to eat together with slaves after all huh.

Still, saying things like catching illness if we eat together is rude.

I divide the seating during meal into two. Rather than for Toruma, I did it because it seemed that our girls wouldn't be able to enjoy their meal.
Since it'd be rude for me as a host to isolate Toruma couple, together with Nana, I sit with the couple.

Part 18 - People of Baron Muno Territory (9)

Satou's here. It's said that ability to read atmosphere is indispensable, but it's different in parallel world, there are unexpectedly a lot of people who behave as they wish here.

If I forget about the difference in social standing, it seems that I would make various mistakes.

◇

When Nana takes off her hood, her blond hair unfolds. Toruma-shi is dazzled by her, Hayuna-san elbows him. So he's really being kept on a short leash by Hayuna-san.

Nana is holding the baby on her arms after receiving permission from Hayuna-san. She looks completely content. Looking as if she's a holy mother--if she doesn't talk.

"She's so fluffy, and soft nano desu. Master, I want to have a young organism too."
"Let's talk about that after this journey is over."
"Masuta?"
"It's my nickname."

Afterwards, the Toruma couple were interested with Nana's eccentric way of speaking, but when I told them that she lived a sheltered life in a distant land which made her poor at Shiga language, they assented. I told them that her meal was only water because her body was weak. Toruma couple seem to be thinking that Nana and I are a married couple. I leave that misunderstand alone since there's no particular harm anyway.

"This is delicious. It's full of rural taste, but the abundant meat is nice, and it even has peppers on top of salt!"
"Thanks to the chopped peppers put in the fried food, my body is warming up."

These two, even though they're saying things as if they're reporters from gourmet program, they're eating intensely. I guess it can't be helped that they're greedy since they probably haven't had good food at the thieves' hideout.
Pochi and Tama are quiet today. They would usually go, "Another please nano desu~". I peek at them, they eat slowly while chewing thoroughly today. They've only eat about half their portions.

Huh? They stand up after finishing half their meal and go toward here. Was it not tasty?

"Meal sharing~?"
"I'm giving half nodesu."

The two offer their plates to Hayuna-san. I wonder why they're presenting it while having very earnest, if not painful, faces.

"Oi oi, no matter how delicious, we won't eat scrapes from demi-human slaves you know?"

Toruma-shi's jeer aren't exactly loud, but the timing is quite bad making it permeate through them.

Hearing that, Pochi's and Tama's ears fall down.

Toruma-shi's remark might not be as harsh if it didn't contain discrimination against demi-human.

However, I cannot let his jeer toward the two who had good-will pass.
Let's ignore this KY Ossan who can't read the atmosphere around him. I won't call him Toruma-shi anymore, from now on he's Ossan.

Oops, rather than talking about Ossan, it's Pochi and Tama.

"What's wrong?"
"It's for the sake of the breast milk for the baby nodesu."
"If she doesn't eat a lot~ the baby will die~?"

I don't quite understand what they're saying, but the reason why they look gloomy since some times ago is this huh.

"Master, there was a baby of a leopard-head woman at the previous owner's place back then. The mother's milk didn't come out because we rarely got food, so the baby died of starvation. During that time, the demi-human slaves were cooperating together to share half of their food, these two remember it."
"I see, Pochi and Tama are kind. There's no need to worry, we have enough food, so you two go ahead and eat. You can ask for another serving like always too."

I understand after listening to Liza's explanation. Considering how the people from that brown rat guild were, I wouldn't be surprised with that treatment.
After hearing my words, Pochi and Tama look at each other and say, "Yatta", happily, while holding their plates with both of their hands on top of their heads. As expected of them for not dropping the vegetable pieces.

Hayuna-san says, "Thank you for worrying.", to Pochi and Tama, but the KY guy is saying, "Then, I will help myself with another serving too." Of course, not only Liza, Lulu also splendidly ignores him. Ossan is wandering around unsteadily with his plate, but since no one responses, he dejectedly get out of the stage. It's pitiful that even Hayuna-san didn't back him up.

It doesn't seem like he's reflecting on it though, when Hayuna-san asks for another serving, he also puts his plate together, asking for another. I give it to him, not out of sympathy but because it's annoying hearing him grumbling on the sideline.

◇

After the meal I go inside the wagon with Nana since Hayuna-san is going to breastfeed the baby. Nana had wanted to go see the breastfeeding, but since it's embarrassing for me, I

take her along.
I'm going to replenish Nana with magic power now.

"Master."
"What is it?"
"I also want to give breast milk to the young organism."
"It won't come out right?"

I could see Nana touching her own breasts since I'm currently supplying her with magic power from behind. Yu~p, they're big.
The milk should comes out when she has a child, but I don't know if a homonculus like Nana could give birth.

"What should I do?"

After we're finished with the replenishment, Nana turns around while asking that question.

Ooh.

This is, good things.

I inadvertently extend my hand, but I suddenly get swatted from behind and fail to do so.

"W, what are you doing, you two!"
"Dirty."

It's Arisa and Mia. Still, when did Arisa make a paper fan anyway.

"'What' you say, I'm just supplying her with magic power."
"Back."
"That's right, didn't we decide that you'd be doing magic replenishment on her back."
"Of course, I did it on her back. Nana had suddenly turned around."
"Is that so?"
"Is it true?"
"Yes, affirmative. I was requesting master to make me produces breast milk."

W, wait Nana-san? If you said such turbulent words...

"Seiza."
"Nn."

I obediently sit in seiza while objecting, but they don't let it pass. It might be because they noticed my gaze to one part of Nana's body midway.
I was almost made to rub Mia and Arisa breasts in order to make them grow big, but I evaded it somehow. That was dangerous. I prefer fighting wagahai-kun to this.

NSFW

◇

After I've finally been released from Arisa and the girls, I go back to where the couple are. It seems the feeding is over.
Looks like the baby was locked in the cellar since her crying was noisy back in the thieves hideout.

When were chatting, Lulu brought tea for the three of us. It's not the blue tea like usual, but herb tea. Lulu says that the blue tea is not good for the mother, or rather, the mother's milk given to the baby.

Hayuna-san and me say thanks to Lulu while receiving the tea, but Ossan asks "What's this, it's not a sake? Is there no wine? Ale is fine too", instead of thanking her. He looks like a drunken old man who harasses a cabin attendant. When he's told that there's no one who drink here, he looks disappointed.

"Still, there sure are a lot of thieves in this territory."
"You're right, we've met many even before we got caught by those guys. At that time, they were outnumbered so they ran away before they fought."

So it's true that thieves would avoid you if they can see mercenaries' presence.

"Furthermore, I was surprised at how many villagers were trying to sell themselves."
"If the harvest is bad, isn't it normal?"
"They said that they didn't have bad harvest."

I tell him that the cause is the wedding of the baron's daughter, but Ossan says something unexpected.

"Hee~, that day dreaming Soruna is getting married huh. Which noble is her partner? He must be quite manly to take a bride from cousin-dono."
"Her partner is the hero-sama it seems."

Hearing that Ossan bursts into laughter while rolling on the sheet like there's something funny.
Even so, I think there would be many noble who would want to marry a lord's daughter, even if he's just a baron. I want to ask what he means by manly, but it'll be going off topic, so let's ignore it.

Hayuna-san who can read the atmosphere reminds Ossan. I wonder how did she marry this person.

"Dear, what are you finding interesting? We don't understand if you just laugh."
"Ha, ha, no well, cousin-dono is famous for liking hero, but I never expect that he would have his daughter marrying hero. This will be a good tie with Saga empire."
"Is Baron-sama fond hero?"
"Yeah, his hobby is collecting books about heroes' tales. There was even a rumor among merchants that he specially built theater in Muno city just to have theatricals about hero."

I see, so that fondness for hero is used.

"Actually I have a merchant acquaintance close to royalty who has meet the hero directly, and the face, figure and features of the hero that he has told me don't match with the hero who's currently staying with baron-sama."
"Hoo? Then Satou-dono, are you saying that cousin-dono has been deceived by a fraud?"
"I'm not saying that much. I cannot think why would a hero be away from Saga empire beside for subjugating the demon lord in this time nearing the demon lord season. Furthermore, there was even a public disturbance in Seryuu city involving sir silver mask who resembled the hero. I'm worried that baron-sama might receive damage too."

I don't actually have a shred of concern, but it's fine like this.
Next, I should naturally mix the thing about the demon in our talk.

"I've also heard rumors about a demon with bat wings appearing near Muno city. Back when I stayed in Seryuu city, a senior demon attacked there, so the rumor『Isn't Muno city also being targeted by demon』is floating around among the merchants."

Mix lies in the truth, even a Russian novelist said so.

"So there was such rumor huh. That explains why we never pass by merchants' carriage as soon as we entered this territory."

Ossan looks convinced while saying so, but I say that's because of the bad public order. On top of that, if you hire people like those at the border, people will avoid this territory which has nothing but bad things. People who don't have urgent business in the dukedom are probably going to avoid passing here right?

I wonder if this talk would reach some influential person, even though it's in the form of rumors. I can't expect anything from this unreliable Ossan, but since Hayuna-san has also heard it, I'm anticipating that it'd flows well through the wifes network.

Part 19 - Golden Holy Sword and Magic Tools

Satou's here. I don't have memories of taking a bath in my own house at midnight after I've become a working adult, probably because of working late. I mostly found myself taking hot shower after waking up early in the morning.

I've only been able to leisurely take my time soaking my body at the grand public bath when I'm staying over.

◇

The night has been cold for the past few days, so the couple are sleeping inside the wagon. Leaving aside Ossan, it'd be troubling if Hayuna-san catches cold and infects the baby.

The combination for the night watch duty today is different than usual.

Usually, Mia, Lulu and me are the first, then Pochi, Tama, Nana for the second, and then Liza and Arisa for the last, but today, Mia is replaced with Arisa.

"What are you making?"
"It's Circuit Liquid."

In most textbooks they're only called magic liquid or Liquid.
The one I'm making now is different from normal Liquid. I'm making the recipe hidden in that bundle of papers.
Yup, even though the raw materials are different, the way of making it is the same as normal Liquid.

"Fuh~n, huh? Isn't it usually shining red?"

Arisa is quite observant eh. I don't answer Arisa since I'm concentrating right now. I continue putting magic while watching the Liquid shines blue.

I pour the finished Liquid into the Circuit carved on one half of the wooden sword.
Since I've let the Liquid temperature to be cooled down, it's not burning like with the wooden pedestal before.

"It's black, is it really a wooden sword?"

I affirm it by lightly nodding since it's pitiful if I ignore her too much. Even though Lulu is watching quietly, this girl is noisy.

I spread thin glue on the remaining half of the wooden sword, and then wrap it with strings. Then I put the sword on the magic bestowing stand, and slowly manipulate the Liquid on the wooden sword using the stand, drawing small intricate pattern.

It seems that Arisa is tired from looking, she lies down sideway hugging her knee while biting

a jerky. She's looking here while remaining in that posture.
Lulu who's beside me gently wipes the sweat on my forehead with a handkerchief. Lulu's girl's power is surely around 530.000.

I try putting magic into the finished wooden sword. The magic flow is worse than Liza's spear, but it's quite good in itself.

The wooden sword's whole body is shining blue.

The light remains even after I stop putting magic power, although it's a bit dimmer.

"Hey, hey, isn't magic sword that shines blue... Th, that can't be it right. There's no way that could be made so easily."

Unrest appears in Arisa's words. It seems that she has noticed the true nature of this sword.

I put magic into the wooden sword once again.
The blue light is pretty.

"Hey, is that really it?"

I wait until the afterimage melts into the darkness, and answer Arisa.

"Yes, it's a holy sword."

◇

"W, wait, holy sword you said?"
"To be exact, it's a pseudo holy sword."

The thing that Arisa had discovered with vertical reading on the paper back in the afternoon was a record of a man's study about the making of holy sword.

The main subject is how you need special Circuit Liquid to make holy swords. You need raw materials like Dragon Powder, powdered jewels, gold nugget etc. I blew 15 gold coins to make the prototype earlier. If this was an MMORPG, a lot of people would give up on raising this skill.

The original part is just that, the rest is just like how you make a magic sword. That particular part is explained inside the books from Trazayuya, so I refer to there.

There's a reason why I called it pseudo.

The wooden sword made earlier is a success, but I'm not able to make holy sword from forged swords. I can't carve precise circuit on a forged sword since it's made by striking hot metal. It's a success this time since wood is a comparatively soft material.
The casting process during the making of magic swords requires someone with high level magic arts skill like Trazayuya, so for something like holy swords, it probably needs even more complicated ritual.

"Pseudo? But it's glowing the same color as the holy sword that the hero (Masaki) has."
"It could exert the same power as the original if the opponent is weak and without substance, but it's still a wooden sword after all. I don't know the Circuit to increase sharpness attack power, so for now, it's nothing but a wooden sword with holy attribute."

Contrary to what one may imagine, the man who left this recipe is not from Saga empire, but Shiga kingdom.
It seems that he was a former researcher of the royal institution who lost in dispute and was driven away to the border. This was also hidden with vertical writing in other papers. Most of the papers contain grudges, but one of them details about the success of the creation of a holy sword with the help of a person called Elf Sage. The sword's name is also written, but since it's quite extravagant, let's not talk about it.

As for this wooden holy sword, it'll break in one hit if it clashes against even the weakest holy sword in my storage, Gjallarhorn. It's probably not even as strong as Liza's spear and only about equal with Pochi's and Tama's short swords.

This blue Circuit Liquid--the research papers refer
it as Blue--does not only possess holy attribute on its blue light, but also draws magic power from nature even if the user isn't putting magic power into it. When I tell Arisa about that function, she shouts out, "Perpetual motion *Kita*!". Rather than perpetual motion, it's more like a wind or solar generated power, I think it's quite convenient. Making it in large-scale is probably NG since it could cause destruction of nature like it has done to the mountain where that Dryad is.

"Let me borrow it~"

Arisa hold out her hands while saying so, I give it to her. Let's make her a matching wooden magic sword later. I could imagine the figure of Arisa holding the sword with both hands while saying some *chuunibyou* lines.

Arisa is enjoying the blue light while putting magic power into it.
Halfway through, she begins to rapidly pour magic power into it, I don't know what she's thinking. What'd you do if it explodes. I take it from her before the crisis perception kicks in.

"That's dangerous, what would you do if it explodes."
"I'm sorry, I was curious how much it could absorb, and I couldn't stop. I didn't reach the limit even after putting 100 points."

I'd like to find out that limit, but it looks like Arisa wouldn't let me go walk in the dark now. I decide to wait for the opportunity since I don't want to hurt anyone in the camping ground.

Might as well play along with this.

I paint the wooden holy sword's surface with golden paint. I carve rose pattern on the hilt and apply powder from crushed sapphire to it. In addition, I put a sapphire that looks like a flower petal on it. I thinly paint the blue liquid (Blue) below the sapphire and when I put magic power into it, it shines blue.

Since the blade part looks desolate, I draw arabesque pattern on top of the golden paint with the blue liquid.

When put with magic power, the golden blade glows blue light, it's glittering and pretty. The rose part on the hilt looks especially good.

"Master, it's lovely desu."
"Uwaah~ what's that, looks like ornament that would make an upstart cries with joy."

Certainly, it's too gaudy huh. Let's make the wooden magic sword silver.

◇

Now then, since the verification is complete, let's begin the trial to make a magic tool for the future. I've already finished the design during the leisure time when we were moving. There are already several samples, so I'm just going to easily join together the parts among them.

First, I draw pattern with the type of Liquid that generates heat on the overly thin copper plate that I've made by pressing copper coin and stretching it during the afternoon today.

Next, I make a propeller the size of a fist by shaving a block of wood.
I put a hole on the center of the propeller and compose circuit that would make it rotate when poured with magic.

The sample for rotating Circuit is easier than I've thought, I just disassemble the spinning top that I have bought before and examine the circuit. The circuit is as simple as expected since it only consumes little magic power. The total cost is roughly one silver coin.

I've easily made this, but looking at the rate of spread, people who are able to create magic tools are probably quite few.

I insert the completed part to the cylinder, and attach the handle as the last touch.

"It can't be!"
"Yes, it's the thing you'd want after you wash your hair."

I leave the trial run to Arisa. The propeller begins to move as she put magic power, and the heat is generated, flowing together with the air.

"I didn't think that the day I could use drier here would happen."

By 'here' she probably means parallel world, you'd want convenient things yeah.
It's going to get cold soon, I should make heating system next. It might be good to make water boiler before Lulu's hands hurt from washing laundry in cold water.

The dream is expanding.

Part 20 - People of Baron Muno Territory (10)

Satou's here. I've heard that you can see fragments of your memories inside your dream.

Although, ever since I led a life of brief sleeps after I became a working adult, I never dream anymore.

◇

Pochi and the girls come to change place with us since the time is up. Arisa says, "I'll be watching you so you don't go out in the night." and takes up the position beside me to sleep together. Usually I would toss her, but since she's done well during the negotiation with ossan today, I'll let her off for once, though this is not a reward.

Of course I warn her that if she tries to sexually harass me, I'll tie and hang her on a tree.

Since even Lulu is taking the position on the opposite side while saying, "M, me too, I'll watch too.", requesting while fumbling her words, we end up looking like character for river.

I hope 5 years passes fast.

Contrary to my expectation, Arisa went asleep without trying to do anything funny.
If she's always like this, I'll let her sleep together anytime.

I check on the demon's movement before I go to sleep.

It's loitering around at the castle and the thieves in the forest like usual, but sometimes, it produces a level 1 split body (Splitter) and lets it wandering around in the city. I tried monitoring it for the whole night before, but since it didn't seem that it killed anyone, it was probably a split body used for gathering information.

There is also another suspicious movement from elsewhere.

The thieves around Muno city are merging with the large thief group in the forest near the city. There are also quite a lot of serfs who have escaped from nearby villages mixed in, they've became a group of around 500 people. If the smaller groups who're moving join with them, it would become 700 people. A revolution could probably takes place.

Furthermore, from northwest--about on the right from where we are now, a bit away from Muno city--armies of demi-goblin are entering the territory. There were only 50 of them in the evening yesterday, but they're nearing 1000 now and are still increasing coming from outside the territory.

Still, I wonder if they have 'demi' because they're subspecies of goblin. Surprisingly, they're not demi-humans but more or less monsters. I'd like to look at them since I've never seen one in person yet.
I've also never seen orcs, but since they're written on this world's tales, they surely exist

somewhere.

The one that knight Eral was looking for during the noon was probably the second daughter of the baron. Why I would think so is because she's currently at the base of the large thief group. She might have been kidnapped and became a hostage. I wonder if it's because of her parents.

Looks like tomorrow, our journey is going to be peaceful, thanks to the movement of the thieves. Since the unnecessary troubles would be decreased, let's strive to reach Muno city at the morning of the day after tomorrow.

I went asleep after I've finished the general investigation.

◇

I had an unusual dream.

I'm dreaming of me playing with the girl who's my first love from the countryside on the grounds of a shrine during my childhood.

If it's just that then it would just be a nostalgic dream, but the scene is different and her personality is also different even though I'm sure that she's the same girl.

I cannot remember the girl's name, but I wonder why do I have this dream during the time when I'm embraced by Lulu and Arisa.

◇

"Like I said, I can't accept with only river."

Arisa gets up while shouting some strange words. She's been grinding her teeth which let out a loud sound since a while ago. In addition, her fingernails on her hands which are grabbing my arms are painful. It's recovered even before I take damage, and it only redden my skin so I leave it alone, but painful thing is painful.

"Good morning, Arisa."
"Good morning? I'm Arisa, your darling."
"Almost there, the last one was wrong."

She only answers by repeatedly pretend-hit me, but there are traces of tears on the area around her eyes. What kind of dream did she have.

Lulu is still sleeping, but she also has traces of tears on her face. When I lower my line of sight, Pochi and Tama are sleeping while curling up like balls on my stomach, saying, "I hate cold~", "I hate hunger nano desu.". It looks like they're having nightmares.

Since everyone seems to be having nightmares, I wake them up by pinching their noses in turns.

"Master? Thank goodness!"
"Morning~? Nyau, it's warm nodesu."
"Good morning nano desu. It's time to prepare for breakfast nano desu."

The three seem to be still half-asleep, they're rubbing their faces on my chest and shoulders with sleepy eyes. It's rare to see such state of Lulu. Usually Arisa would have took this chance to jump in, but she's gone to wash her face.

I'm thinking that an incubus might have came but there's nothing when I search for it. If it was really incubus, my crisis perception would have kicked in earlier.

Mia and Liza were also dreaming about their hometown. It seems that Nana didn't have any particular dream. So she did not see something like electric sheep or magic sheep.

There is nothing attacking us that day as expected, it's a truly a peaceful day.

It just that, Pochi and Tama become excessively clingy to me while rubbing their face on me today, I couldn't make anything during the travel. Since they look really uneasy, I play card and *shiritori* with Pochi and Tama for the whole day today.

I invite Hayuna couple since they look bored, but it seems Ossan gets addicted to the games, he becomes really frolic. I wish Hayuna-san infuses him with her elegance.

◇

That night I have the continuation of the dream from yesterday. And sure enough, everyone also had strange dream when I asked them the next morning.

I thought that it was the work of the demon, but after seeing the demon's skill and its tribe's innate skill, it doesn't seem so.

The demon is from a tribe called Short Horn, it seems they have short horn with bat wings, and look like gargoyles. Its skill are, [Ghost Magic], [Mind Magic], [Transform], [Bewitching], only those fours.

This demon has been staying in the neighboring forest since the noon yesterday.

The gathered thieves were peaking at more than 700, but the number is only in one digit now. I don't understand how it could decrease so sharply during the time I wasn't looking, but after seeing zombies which keep appearing with the demon at the center, I understand the situation.

The demi-goblin lot are also coming near the zombies. They've stopped increasing, but they've became 3000 strong in the end.

Sometimes the zombies' number decrease, in exchange skeletons appear, I don't want to know what happen.

The baron's daughter who seemingly was kidnapped by the thieves seemed to have successfully escaped. She's running into the forest depth together with a man with conspicuously high level among the thieves, I don't know if he's charmed or if they're acquaintance from the beginning.

Inside the baron's area, the territorial army has gone toward the thieves' forest early in the morning, it looks like the rescue operation for the daughter has begun. They're numbering in over 1000. Apparently, they've also employed local mercenaries and slaves.

The hero isn't among those in the army. Looks like he's inside the baron's castle.

With these many flags standing, even without crisis perception skill, I get premonition for great tumult happening.
I must evacuate everyone to the safe place as soon as possible.

◇

We've finally arrived at Muno city, but the gate is sealed shut, we can't get in.
Right now, we negotiate by showing Ossan's dagger, but since none of the guards are familiar with the seal on the dagger, we've been invited to the castle.

"I will go with Toruma couple to meet the baron. I'd like everyone to go to the village up ahead with the wagon to do something."

Ossan invited us all, but if I'm careless here, the couple could die and I wouldn't be able to visit the workshop.

Even though I'm going to meet face to face with the baron, I don't really have the intention to tell him to do something to his territory. I feel sorry for the people like the children and the elders I've meet back then, but it's not at the degree where I want to save them no matter what. Even regarding the fake hero, I only feel that I should help in some way or other.

Therefore, I want to ensure the safety of Liza and the girls.

"Master, what should we do?"
"Un, there's a village up ahead. I want you to gather pebbles that look like this at the river beside the village. I want you to ask the village's chief to request everyone to collect those pebbles."
"Tama will gather~"
"Pochi will work hard too nodesu."

I continue the talk while putting my hands on Pochi's and Tama's head who take firm poses with "Swoosh."

"Un, I'm happy for your eagerness, but we should give the works to the villagers."

I explain it to everyone in detail.

They have to gather 100 pebbles. I'll buy the pebbles for 1 copper coin each.
I leave the judging of the gathered pebbles to Tama who has gathering skill.
I'm entrusting Arisa with calculating the money and negotiating with the village's chief.
Liza will be beside the wagon so that the villagers won't underestimate them.
Nana will be the master, while Lulu and Mia will be the servants.

"What should Pochi do nodesu?"
"Pochi will act as bodyguard for Arisa when the pebbles are exchanged for money."
"Roger~ nano desu."

Now then, the explanation is OK with this. I should join with Hayuna-san and Ossan.
Arisa catches my clothes before I can get off the wagon.

"No, absolutely no."

Tears accumulate on Arisa's eyes, and she refuses wholeheartedly.
Huh, does she really not want to be the negotiator? I think she's more suited for that than anyone else here.

"Then, would you swap with Lulu?"
"No, I don't want to let y, master go alone."

It's fine of her to call with *anta,* but she used the stiff *goshujin-sama* huh.

"It's not like I'm going to a battlefield. I'm only accompanying Toruma couple to the baron's castle, I'm only thinking of seizing the chance to meet with the baron face-to-face you know?"

I try to sound as carefree as possible with some jokes.

"I've thought of appealing to him about the people if he's a person who's easy to talk into, but I will prioritize my safety first, so it's going to be alright."

However, sensitive Arisa doesn't seem let this pass. She presses on me while raising her shoulders.

"That's a lie, the fact that you don't take us into the city is the proof."

You're spot on.

Now then, what to do.

Part 21 - People of Baron Muno Territory (11)

Satou's here. Split body (Bunshin) is a staple of Ninja, but when I was a child my juvenile mind thought, "If you could move that fast to make bunshin, you should've attack like that instead."

It might be the right choice when you fight against firearms.

◇

"I promise, it won't be dangerous."

If it's just me alone then it'd alright. The opponent is just a level 30. Moreover, I have magic attack and magic shield, not only physical now.

"No, I'll go with you."

That's bad. The demon is in the forest right now, but I don't know when it's going to be back. I want to leave Arisa in safe zone.

"If you say further than that, I'll use『Order』."
"Try it, my maiden's heart won't lose to such thing like『Order』."

It can't be helped.
I didn't want to use『Order』as much as possible.

"Arisa, this is an order. Go to the village I've said earlier and ask the mayor about the work. Wait in the village until I get there."

After telling so, I go down the wagon.
I hear something falling on the ground behind me along with Lulu's short scream.

When I turn around, I see Arisa crawling here while her face becoming blue.

"I w,will absolutely go with you. This time... I wont... Let you go alone... Ha."

By disobeying my order, she's not only tormented by the magic from the contract, but it seems that the slavery collar on her neck also harms her physically. The collars on the beastkin girls are just decoration, but the ones on Lulu and Arisa are real magic tools. They were attached from Kubooku kingdom.
No, this isn't the time to think that. Arisa would die if I leave her alone.

"Arisa, I cancel the order earlier."

Arisa is gasping painfully. What a rash girl. I wonder what makes her go that far. The collar has left red mark on Arisa's neck.

"Good grief, you're really a rash girl."

"Who's the rash one here. You jumped into the shadow to save Mia, and even just the other day, you lured out a monster almost twice your level to secure food for the children... I'm worried about you, stop doing unreasonable things alone."

Arisa says so while shedding tears.

I've noticed something from those tears and "Almost twice your level."

Dang.

I didn't expect this at all.

I thought that Arisa who had shrewdly noticed that I hid my skill would had also realized that I falsified my level, I thought that she was playing dumb about it due to my misunderstanding.

I can understand Arisa's unnatural state up until now when I consider so.

She would certainly be worried if a level 10 guy picked a fight with a level 40 undead boss which had unknown unique skills.

I'm sorry that I think you're like an overprotective mother.

However, this is troubling, if I tell her that I'm hiding my level right here and now, Arisa's pride would collapse.
I can't exactly clown around Arisa who's genuinely worried too, I guess I have no choice but to take her along.

It's my penalty for pointlessly worrying Arisa. It'd be hard to protect her, but if it's just Arisa alone, I would protect her no matter what.

"I understand Arisa, let's go together."
"R, right, you should've said so from the start. You'd have the strength of hundred me with me around!"

Even while wiping her tears with her sleeves, Arisa boasts, she's back to her usual self. Still, her vocabulary is old like usual.
Arisa gets back to the wagon to change her clothes that has been covered in mud.

Now then, I wonder who should I choose to replace Arisa. Among them, Liza is the best choice, but considering her tribe, it would be difficult to negotiate with insular villagers.

Which means, the next candidates are Lulu or Nana. I can't imagine the whimsical Tama to negotiate, and the silent Mia negotiating would be as probable as the sky falling.

I want Lulu to do the negotiation if possible, would have loved if she acquires interpersonal skills, but since she's shy around people, it might be impossible.

Then, Nana is the only one remaining huh.

She normally has eccentric behavior and her way of speaking is flat, but she'd be in "my pace"-mode whoever her opponent is and her appearance is a beautiful woman.
I guess I'll ask Nana to bear the brunt, and Liza to follow-up her.

"Nana."
"Yes, master."
"Have you ever done negotiation before?"
"No, I am a virgin. I have no experience."

...who ask you about sexual experience.

When I see her expression and atmosphere, I've thought that she's just naive, but I have some doubt, "Weren't you being wrong on purpose?"

Let's tell her more in detail.

"I want to ask you to negotiate for employing the villagers, do you have any knowledge about doing something like that?"
"I have not."
"Okay, then I want you to cooperate with Liza to deal with it. Nana, you become the front during the negotiation while Liza is the one who's actually doing it from the back."
"Yes, master."
"I will exert the fullest of my ability."

Liza's reply is stiff. Is she nervous?

"Liza, you don't need to get so worked up. I don't mind even if the negotiation fails. If that happen, I want you girls to stand by on the river near the village."
"I understand, master."

It seems that strength leave her shoulders. I'm worried that she might have interpreted it as, "I don't expect anything from you.", but it seems that I'm just imagining things.

◇

Arisa who has came back is wearing clothes that she's made after the fashion show back then. The skirt is equipped with frame made from wire inside, making it expands in three dimensions. She's wearing blond wig.

That's good and all, but who's the little girl with brown braided hair behind?

...No, I can see Pochi's appearance as a double.

"Is that Pochi?"
"Ara, you did well to know. Arisa-chan version 2, Pochi human form."

The two are taking pose energetically.
Even though they've dressed in cute clothes, taking power ranger pose ruins it.

"Version 2 whatever, how did you do that to Pochi?"
"Don't whatever it! I can't forgive that nonexistent reaction toward blond twin-tail, even though it's not drills."

Twin-tail look good with figurine or 2 dimensions, but in real life, I think having twin-tail only makes you look more like children though?

"I've received Arisa's magic nodesu."
"A~ah, didn't I say to keep it a secret. I create illusion using light magic. It's originally a magic to create split body, but I've arranged it for a bit."

I see, so it was light magic. However, to arrange magic in such short term like this, this girl is like some kind of protagonist from light novel.

Pochi human form looks exactly like Arisa if we exclude her hair style and color.

"Although if an illusion magic with bigger scale touch Pochi, it'd get exposed, and if I'm not near her, the spell would be broken. She might not be allowed to enter the castle if they know that she's a dogkin tribe."
"Would it get past something like magic detection?"
"Even if she gets exposed, I'll make Toruma cover her. I'm sure we'd only be scolded. Moreover, I want Pochi who has high offensive and enemy search skill to be around."

It feels like Arisa is optimistic that Pochi's cover will be blown. Also, I think Tama has higher enemy search skill. Although, Pochi was probably chosen because Tama would not be suitable for infiltrating.

"You know, during the dream yesterday, I saw that demon is disguising as the baron. Master was able to very narrowly avoid the demon's attacks, but you were finally cornered... Of course, I know that it's just a dream. However, if it was a prophetic dream..."

No, rather than optimistic, she wants Pochi to go even while taking that risk huh. Putting aside what I see myself, it seems that the members are excessively worried because they were having bad dreams.

Arisa is about to say something before stammering and stopping, then she's shaking her head as if she shakes off some kind of anxiety. Her swaying hair is hitting Pochi's face, Pochi holds her own face.

"It's okay! Even if it was a propethic dream, we'll get through it since you're with Pochi and me."
"Yes nano desu. If master is with Pochi, we're invicible nano desu!"

It's incomprehensible since the expression of the illusion isn't changing, but I can picture Pochi full of motivation in my mind.

◇

The dream that Arisa has seen is probably just a mere dream.

However, Arisa's worry is genuine. Her excessive worry is like some kind of loyal retainer like samurai, it's a bit scary.
When I find the opportunity after it becomes safe, I should do some actions that would blow away her worry, while making sure it would get seen through by Arisa.

Even though it can't be helped in Arisa's case, I actually want Pochi to be with Liza's team, but I can't think of any excuse in this situation.
I think I'm becoming unable to think for myself thanks to Arisa.

It can't be helped, I don't want to expose Arisa and Pochi to danger, but if an accident happen, I'll carry both of them and do something about it.

There's no one with appraisal skill that could see other's people stat in the city. Also, there aren't anyone who has magic skills from detection branch. It's convenient for us, but those people might have been eliminated by the demon to protect its secret.

I'm worried that the combat force is reduced for Liza and the girls, but it should be okay since we're not the target this time. Even if anything happen, the village is only 10 kilometers away. I can rush to get there in 90 seconds.

Part 22 - Battle of Muno City (1)

Satou's here. They've said that the punishment for traffic law breaker is light, yet here, the situation seems to be slanted toward the opposite of expectation.

I'm keeping safety in mind when I'm driving a wagon.

◇

Two horse-drawn carriages have come from the baron to pick us up. Either of them is a two-seater carriage. The doors are carved with relief that looks like it'd make stylish nobles happy, and also adorned with golden stones that seem like jewels.

Hayuna couple get on separate ride from us.

I've known it from preliminary check already, but this city is too deserted. Even though it's almost twice the size of Seryuu city, the population is only around 1/6 of it. Houses are standing in row as we leave the gate, but in the middle of the way, series of vacant lots covered with weeds unfold.

"There are many vacant lots huh."
"Sir, are you familiar with the incident 20 years ago."
"Yeah, although I don't know how much of it is true, I've heard the general rumor."
"Most of it is probably the truth. The vacant lots were the result of the king's armies setting fire in the city to destroy the many undeads who were attacking."

The coachman answered my question while facing the road. His voice is loud, not losing to the carriage's noise.

"King's armies?"
"Yes, after the undead had extracted their revenge by killing the entire lineage of the old noble, they remained inside the city without moving. So the king had wanted to do something before they would move. The commoners who died from the fire set by the armies are several times more than from the undead since they wouldn't get attacked by the undead if they stayed inside the house."

At least, "Set the fire after you evacuate the commoners.", or maybe they didn't know about the actual site?

"Because of that, there were a lot of people who left this territory. Now, there aren't even 20% left of the people from 20 years ago."
"It's good that the city doesn't disappear even after that."
"That's because this city has a wall protecting it. The wall was made in the time of ancestor king and was enhanced with fixation magic, even if monsters attack, it wouldn't move an inch. A city simply cannot be made in another location if it's not by a high-ranking noble."

I see, no wonder the wall looks splendid in spite of the poor territory.

◇

I hear crashing sound and people's scream ahead the carriage. After a bit of pause, our carriage shooks a bit as it gets across something.

"Sir, and madam, I'm sorry for the shaking. Some poor people were jumping "Stop at once" in."

Arisa orders so as she interrupts the coachman's excuse. As expected of a princess, she's used with commanding words. The coachman reflectively stopped from Arisa's order.
The horse-drawn carriage had ran over a little girl.

I jump out of the carriage and run to the girl. The girl's HP is decreasing rapidly.

"Make ways!"

It's irritating to get through the people who swarm the girls with my footworks. However, I made it barely in time.

I take out a magic medicine (potion) from my pocket while sitting beside the girl and make her drink it. It seems she has fainted, her breathing has stopped. The medicine spills out from her mouth because of that. Her HP has stopped decreasing for a moment, maybe because she's drunk a bit of it.

I've wanted to press her chest to do artificial respiration, but it probably has been hit by the carriage, her chest is depressed. It's impossible like this.

I take another potion from my pocket, and drink it to her mouth-to-mouth.
Maybe because the effect is weak, the girl's HP bar fluctuates for a bit, then it begins decreasing little by little.
Even though Ossan who was fatally stabbed by a sword was saved, is it no good for this girl.
Or maybe the damage continues on because the broken rib is piercing her.

Should I use the medicine with unknown effect in the storage even while knowing the risk?

Arisa who has finally caught up grabs a short cane from my waist.

"Let me borrow the short cane, ■■■■■■ ■■■ ■■■■■■ ■■■ Light Healing"

It's a healing magic from light huh. Arisa is doing good.
However, it's just a temporary relief.

"It's no good, it's not enough with just light healing magic."
"We should take her to the temple priest."

The people around us deny those words.

"There's no priest who can use holy magic in this city. Everyone was caught after they were accused of made-up crime like corruption and thrown into the prison."

"Either way, she can't be saved with those wounds. Let her go without suffering more."

Not only her chest is depressed, her arm is bent unnaturally too. Her physical strength that has been fluctuating also begins dropping slowly. Her HP is already less than 10%.

When I've decided that giving her medicine with unknown effect is better than letting her die, the scene of me making the magic medicine (potion) flashes in my mind.

The differences between normal and magic medicines are in the reagent and the presence of magic power.

The reagent is just a thing to fuse the magic power with the drug.

Then, the immediate effect of the medicine is due to the existence of magic power.

I put the magic potion in my mouth once again. And before I drink it to the girl, I pour magic power into the potion. I have skill for bestowing magic, I should be able to do it.

I pour it three times the amount of magic power usually used to make normal magic potion.

"Wa... wait, is that some kind of skill, you're glowing you know."

I'm bothered with what Arisa is saying but let's think about that later. I make the girl drink the magic strengthened potion mouth-to-mouth.

Immediately after she's drunk it, her body becomes wrapped in red aura, but it soon disappears as if sucked in.

She hasn't completely recovered, but it's working. Her depressed chest and broken arm have been restored too. Her HP is stopped at around 40%, but it's not decreasing when I watch it for a while.

>[Magic Healing Skill Acquired]

>Title [Doctor] Acquired
>Title [Healing Specialist] Acquired
>Title [Saint] Acquired

◇

"Did you save onee-chan?"
"Yeah, she's alright now."
"Oh my, magician-sama is really great. I can't believe that kind of grave injury could be healed."

I give another potion to a little girl who looks to be the injured girl's little sister, she's clinging to her.

"If she doesn't wake up after 1-2 hours, give her this medicine."

"Un, I understand."

An old lady who seems to be an acquaintance with the little girl talks to me while looking hesitant.

"Magician-sama, thank you very much. However, lowly citizens like us cannot pay you back."
"It was my carriage that ran over the girl. I'm not expecting compensations at all. Rather, it should be the girl who should seek reparations."

I change the subject since it looks like it would have steered toward selling themselves again.
However, the expressions of the old ladies are poor.

"We can't possibly ask reparations. It's a crime to obstruct the path of noble's carriage like this girl has done after all."
"That's right sir, even if you save her now, she'll be caught by the soldier to become a slave or get hanged."

The coachman adds on the words of the old lady.

Oi oi fantasy, isn't that too severe.

I've saved her after much effort. I'll save her with any cost even if it's just for my own self-satisfaction.
If by being saved means she'd become slave or executed, let's make it so that she's not saved.

The surrounding people seem to be allies of the girl anyway, the only real witness is the coachman.
Let's coax him somehow.

He might betray me later by telling what happen here to the baron, but rather than being suspicious of everything, let's use whatever method available.

"Now then, I've finished taking care of the poor girl who had been ran over by the carriage. Let's not make baron-sama wait any longer and go."

I make the coachman grips a silver coin.
The girl died despite the treatment. The girl's name remains unknown.

"Righto, sir. The girl who was ran over is pitiful, but it can't be helped eh."

This man can read atmosphere quite well. I'd like Toruma ossan to learn some things from him.
Looks like the coachman rides on the farce with the bribe. Even so, is his underling-like way of talking instead of the polite way from just before also a part of the farce?

The adults around also participate in the farce by pretending to cry. What sociable people they are. The little sister who can't follow the story has became flustered, but after the old lady whispers something to her, she immediately understands.

We get back on the carriage, and advance to the baron's castle located at the elevated ground.

At that time, the battle between the 1000 baron army and 3000 demi-goblins begins. At the moment, it seems that the baron army is advantageous.

>[Acting Skill Acquired]
>[Tact Skill Acquired]

>Title [Poor Actor] Acquired
>Title [Clown] Acquired

Part 23 - Young Lady and Knight Thief

"Father and sister are being tricked desuwa."

How many times have I told this to them. Yet, my words didn't reach anyone. And now, those vulgar ruffians are strutting this castle like it's their own.

Maybe that's why. I feel like something is calling me, and I've strayed to the old, old collapsed building inside the castle.
It's an old building that has been around in this marquis Muno castle since 20 years ago.

It has already been 15 years since my father received this territory. My mother, sister and me arrived in this castle 16 years ago, we've never left even once since then. The time when uncle Toruma came to play during my childhood was the most fun time.
Even though it's called castle, there are small forest and pond inside its ground, maybe it's to show the power as a marquis, so I don't really feel locked up.

I've searched through the inside of the castle, but this is the first time I'm here. Usually the maid will not let me inside saying, "It's dangerous."

I wonder if this is because I've entered an unfamiliar place. I think that the floating dust lit by the sunlight is beautiful, I feel pleasant. It seems that I would cough violently if I don't enter while covering my mouth with a handkerchief.

There's a throne in this room, I wonder if it was an audience hall of the marquis. The light spilling from the crumbled roof creates illusion that makes this room looks like a sacred place.

And then, I meet my destiny here.

◇

"O girl, do you desire power."
"Yes."

I answered the words that suddenly came out from the direction of the throne.
Even though I'm reflecting on it, I assert that I don't have any regret on the rash decision that I've made this time.

"Very well! Then, I will give you!"

Silver light that appears from the throne wraps me. It feels like it coils around my hair and body. When I'm assailed with anxiety, elegant bracelets appear knitted with silver thread on both my wrists. I feel something odds on my ankles, and anklets with the same design as the bracelet are there when I look.

"O girl, the contract has been established. Wisdom and bravery are yours to take."

"Where in the world are you? In addition, won't you kindly tell me what these accessories are?"

Even though I could hear him closely, I can't see his figure. I desperately try to keep myself calm and talk to the invisible gentleman.

"There is a large mirror behind that curtain. You should see there."

I go to the mirror guided by that voice. A tiara has appeared on my head before I was aware of it.

"The accessories on your head, hands and feet are my forms. I had ran alongside my master to the battleground, and finally accomplished my long-cherished wish. My master had left me here and said, "Help a person who wish to crush unreasonable power."
"Oh my, how wonderful. What a noble-minded person."

I wonder who is this the master of this tiara. I have never seen a talking magic tool beside in the fairy tales.

"Tiara-san, is it fine to call you that?"
"My previous master called me Raka. It was a name associated with the most famous knowledgeable magic tool <<Intelegent Item>> that came out in tales of his hometown. If you don't have any name you want to particularly use, I'd like you to call me Raka."
"I understand Raka-sama. As for myself, please call me Karina."
"This is pleasant. Karina-dono, you don't need to politely use "Sama" for magic tools. It is fine to just call me by the name."
"Then Raka. I want to borrow your power."
"It is inevitable. I will assist you whether the opponent is a hero or a demon lord."
"Oh my, how reliable desuwa, the opponent is a hero."

When Raka-san talk, the tiara is glowing blue, but is he at loss of words? The blue glow has stopped.

"Is there anything wrong?"
"No, it's just that, I'm just thinking that the master this time is firm, it's excellent. Particularly, master "It's Karina desuwa" Umu, Karina-dono."
"Yes."
"Since the opponent is a hero, does Karina-sama have any experience in magic and swordsmanship?"
"No, I'm good at embroidery and poem, but I leave the fighting to the knights."
"Fumu, is that how it is. My previous master was a hero."
"What is his name!"

I've done a shameful thing. I involuntary bumped against the mirror. This is also something I got from father. He's been talking about heroes since I was small, so I've also gained interest on heroes desuwa.

"I'm sorry, I cannot remember trivial things like name or appearance. Wielding a holy sword,

he cut down thousands of demons, he was the owner of tremendous swordsmanship. Even though he couldn't use magic, he could cut the demon lord's magic and subjugated the demon lord. He was an absurd existence."
"That's right, hero-sama has to be like that!"

I involuntarily put power in my fists. A hero has to be strong beyond common sense above all, If not, he's not a hero.

That self-proclaimed hero who has gained favor of father-sama and onee-sama could only narrowly win against a weak knight, he's just a small fry desuwa.
As the proof, he was always eluding the fight against the strongest knight in the castle, sir Zotor.

"Karina-dono, it's painful to say, but I can only reinforce the power that my master has. I, myself, have power to read mind and use simple magic arts, but I need to use my master's magic power to do so."
"Then, am I to remain unable to do anything?"
"Right, you'd be able to win against average knights, and I can give you physical ability enough to jump across roofs. If the opponents are the like of thieves, then you could obliterate them as long as you have magic power."
"Oh my, that's wonderful."

How wonderful it is. It's like the chivalrous phantom thief, Sharururuun.

"However, that is if the opponent is normal."

Hearing Raka-san's words, my fluttering heart hardened as if wedged.

"Is it no good?"
"Even if I could increase my master's power by one hundredfold, if my master's power is 1, it could only become 100. It's appropriate to call an existence called hero as unreasonable."
"Didn't your past master fight against that unreasonable power?"

The blue light is flickering, and Raka-san says something as if he's found a breakthrough.

"It is so. To be admonished by a baby, this is a good day."
"My, I'm an adult even like this."

I feel a bit shocked at my own words. Before I knew it, I'm at the age where I can participate in society. Onee-sama might have unexpectedly knew about the fact that the hero is an impostor. That man only looks like hero on the outside.

◇

"That man is hero desuno."
"Fumu, are you sure?"
"Yes."

I somehow feel the blue light from Raka-san flashing.
His next words are shocking.

"That is an impostor."

Even though, I was insisting about it, I might have believed it (that he was a hero) somewhere in my heart. Then, just what is the sword that he has which lets out blue light like a holy sword.
I went out of the hiding to convict him, but Raka-san's word stopped me.

"Wait, Karina-dono, who is the man beside that fake hero."
"Are you talking about the consul?"
"That man is a demon. He's most likely many times stronger than the fake hero. We cannot win."

N, no way! I was shocked to learn that the self-proclaimed hero is an impostor, but it was even more terrible to hear that a demon had been acting as the consul.
Demons are existences that have to be attacked with army. The only exception where an individual could win against the demon is only a handful of existences like the real hero.

"Ra, Raka. W, what should we do."
"Please calm down, Karina-dono. If my last memory is correct, this is the territory of marquis Muno right."
"Today it's baron, but yes, you're right."
"Then, there should be a community of wood giants in the depth of the nearby forest. If you're with me, we could get their assistance. However, I can't approve of a woman going deep into the forest alone."

I hate to dirty my dress, but a real hero wouldn't hesitate.

"Could the giants win against the demon?"
"Umu, they're not as strong as the hero, but they shouldn't lag behind a common demon."
"Then, let us go."
"It's reassuring seeing your prompt decision. Karina-dono could very well be a great supporter for the hero."

I try to remain calm as much as possible even though my heart is in festive from Raka-san's words, I head toward the forest.

◇

Guided by Raka-san, I leap over the caste's center and borrow a horse from the stable in front of it to go toward the forest.

When I tried to save a Unicorn who was caught by the thieves, I got caught instead, but I reunited with someone unexpected there.

"Milady, what are you doing in this kind of place."

"Sir Zotor, you too."

I didn't think that the strongest knight in this territory who had ran away several years ago would became a thief. Moreover, according to his story, the thieves are going to rebel against father.
With encouragement from Raka, I confide him about the fake hero and the demon consul.

"That, I've thought that he was suspicious, but to think that he's a demon."
"It is the truth. I swear on the honor of my previous master before Karina-dono, I do not tell lies."

I had thought that he probably got a lot of question while listening to my words. But he anticlimactically accepted the talk just like that.

"I feel bad for the chief of the wanderer that had accepted me, but I will leave here. Karina-sama, please allow me to accompany you to the giants."
"I allow it, knight Zotor."

This is wonderful desuwa. It's like in the tale.
I ride on the unicorn's back and go together with knight Zotor to the wood giants' village deep in the forest.

I do not know if I could obtain their cooperation.

No, that's not it.

I will obtain their cooperation no matter what.
By threatening, or defiling this body, I will accomplish my purpose. That is noblesse oblige.

I have the sword of sir Zotor, and also the wisdom of Raka-san who has spent long years.
Yes, right now, I have companions.

"Now, I am not afraid of anything."

I cheer myself so, and, toward the gate of the village of wood giants in front of me, I take a step forward.


デスマーチからはじまる
異世界狂想曲
4

Part 24 - Battle of Muno City (2)

Satou's here. Back then, a friend of mine has said that moe will save the world. Admiring cute things would heal you, that's no different no matter the world.

Moe might would unexpectedly save the world.

◇

I knew that the baron's castle is wide from the map, but after I actually went inside it, it's more vast than I've imagined. There are a forest and a big pond that occupy about three times more area than the castle.
People only occupy a few percents of the whole area, won't the maintenance be hard I wonder?

Hayuna-san and co. had been separated with us since they didn't get involved with the trouble.

We're heading toward a four-story big mansion on the hill of the same area, not the castle. There's no problem since Baron, Hayuna-san and the others are there.
Of course, the fake hero is also near the baron.

The split body of the demon is also there, but it doesn't get close to the baron. The real body is inside the forest like usual. Seems that it doesn't participate in the battle and only let the goblin soldiers to do it. I wonder if it's enjoying them killing each other?

The carriage enters the rotary in front of the mansion while I'm thinking so.

Although there is no red carpet spread, around 20 maids are lined up on the left and right to greet us.

Although I say maids, they're not wearing aprons or white brims, but just plain navy blue dresses. It's probably a uniform since they all wear the same clothing.

I can feel Pochi looking around restlessly behind me even though I can't see her. I leave it to Arisa who has warned her in low voice.

"Welcome, I'm happy to have you here. Magician Satou-sama and the ladies."

A single man in butler uniform greets us. I also say thanks for the grandiose reception.
I want ask him why he called me magician not merchant.

"If you have luggage, let me carry them for you."

Since butler-san said so, I hand him over the bag, knife and short cane from my waist. This knife is an ornamental thing to match my clothes, giving off strong feeling.
Butler-san receives only the bag, and gives me back the knife and the short cane.

"Satou-sama, it is alright to bring the dagger and the cane for self-protection."
"Isn't it rude to bring weapons before the baron?"

I check it for the time being, but butler-san slowly shakes his head denying it.

"There is no need to worry. It's an order from the consul. Furthermore, a truly reliable person is on baron-sama's side. Baron-sama won't be hurt unless it's the demon lord who's attacking."
"Hoo, that's amazing. I want to meet that person by all mean."
"I'm sure that you'll be surprised. Please look forward to it."

The one whom this person talks about is surely the fake hero. However, to even permit people who visit bringing sword, I think they're too trusting to that fake hero.
Or maybe the demon's purpose is to let someone harm them?

We follow butler-san who's leading the way. Two maids are following us. I've thought that they might be knight ladies who are monitoring us, but seeing their levels and skills, they're real maids.

However, I wonder what is this faint incongruity I'm feeling?

◇

We arrive in front of the baron's room guided by butler-san, Arisa tightly clenches her fists. Is she worrying about the dream?
As soon as we enter the room, Arisa sees the baron, and then she relaxes while plainly looking relieved. With this, it seems that she has confirmed that the dream is not prophetic.
Thanks to her relaxing, I've also calmed down a bit. Due to the hit-and-run case a while ago, my mind had been occupied with ominous thought as to how to confront the baron.

Let's confirm the person himself first before making judgment.

"Hey, you're finally here. Cousin-dono, let me introduce them, Satou-dono the magician, and Arisa-dono the merchant. Err, the one over there is Arisa-dono's little sister I guess."

When we get into the room as guided by butler-san, Toruma-shi (ossan) who's in sight, introduces us to the baron.
Come to think of it, I've never said that Arisa is a slave huh. Her collar was hidden by the clothes too, there was no way this KY guy would realize it. Still, from his standpoint, Arisa is a merchant huh...
However, I'd like to praise him for not ignoring Pochi.

"Nice to meet you, I am an inexperienced magician and a merchant, Satou."

I was a bit lost, but I decided to emphasize on the [Merchant].
Arisa bows while holding up her skirt without giving her name. Pochi also bowing imitating Arisa after looking around restlessly.

There are 3 other man and women inside the room aside from Ossan's family. There were two maids at the corners of the room, but they're not counted.

First, the man who looks to be the baron, he's a plump man with black hair and mustache. I was expecting that he was a typical detestable guy who's sitting back with outstretched legs arrogantly, but instead, he's sitting with smiling face.

The second is a black-haired woman who has calming atmosphere, looks like she's the daughter. Although she has black hair, her feature doesn't look Asian, but more like a Greek. If I have to say, she is beautiful, but she doesn't have special characteristic beside a mole on the corner of her eye. I cannot see her figures since I can't see it from our position.

And the last one is a macho man who sit on the sofa while leaning to the woman, he's a handsome young man with black hair and black pupils. This young man is the fake hero of course. You can only see him as a refreshing young man on looks alone. He has a straight sword with blue sheath on his white knight clothes. From outside, he's hero enough alright.
His companions are in different building together with the split body (Splitter).

"I see, so you are the young magician-dono who commands the strong demi-human slaves. Thank you for saving Toruma's life. I can't thank you enough no matter how many times I say it.
This territory is only vast and can't be called prosperous, but I'd like you to peacefully rest your fatigue here. It pains my heart that I cannot give you significant service, but I would welcome your stay however long you want."

The baron expressly stands up and goes near me to say thank you.

This is strange.
Normally, nobles are arrogant, yet he's awfully friendly.
On the contrary, that friendliness is too suspicious. I wonder if this person an impostor too?

I confirm by AR, but he's the real one no doubt. There is no abnormal status too.

"Father, I know that you're excited in meeting a brave young man, but can you sit at least? I feel sorry for the little ones."

This time it's the baron's daughter chiding the baron. Her tone is as calm as her appearance suggests. Her voice is childish unsuited for her age.

Is this how these people usually acts?
With these down-to-earth people ruling the territory, why are the territory people going through such difficult time?

No, they are nobles after all, this might be an act. There might be skills that could make it happen, although the possibility is low, I'll stay cautious for a bit more.

◇

"Oh my, what adorable girls *kashira*."

The daughter stands up by borrowing the fake hero's hand, and walks toward Arisa and Pochi.

Tayun.

Yes, there is no more appropriate representation for it.

My eyes aren't focusing to the baron who's speaking friendly in front of me, but toward the it that sway at the time when the daughter stands up.

Big--No, it's enormous breasts (Bakunyuu) word represented in real life.

The daughter slowly steps forward, and matching her, it sways and shakes, captivating me.

It's truly an art. Brassieres are not wide-spread in this world, so how do such masses are contained, I wonder. Don't tell me, it's magic? It must be magic!

Ouch.

Arisa kicks my leg while I'm thinking stupid things. Arisa glares from below.

"Hello, little lady. I am called Soruna, can you tell me your name?"

The daughter lower her waist to match Pochi's and Arisa's line of sight, and begin to talk with voice that seemingly has musical notes attached at the end. Arisa obstructs my view on the valley with her whole body.

No well, I think right now, it's more important to prevent the young lady from carelessly touching Pochi.

"Pochi nano desu!"
"Cute! I want this kind of girl!"

Pochi introduces herself with the usual "Swoosh!" pose, maybe unable to endure it, the young lady suddenly hugs Pochi.

Arisa tried to pull Pochi from the side, but she didn't make it in time. I could have blocked it faster, but since it looked like it'd end up in a situation where I would have a hard time making up excuse in different sense, I hesitated. Even if I made it in time, her hand would go through the illusion, exposing it.

Pochi who's being hugged by the young lady tilts her head to the side. Pochi who's hugged, happily hugs back while still wearing the expressionless face of the illusion.

"Ara? She feels different from her looks?"

The young lady's hands have gone through the illusion. Excuse is already impossible. Let's

use this opportunity to see the true nature of the baron family.
I ask Arisa to release the illusion on Pochi.

"My, the girl turned into a dog girl-san! How cute *kashira*, she looks like a stuffed toy *desuwa*."

The daughter who has seen Pochi's figure hugs her without looking disgusted. Tension falls off me and Arisa, Pochi remains to be hugged by the young lady. No wait, it looks like Pochi finds the pressing breasts curious, she's having fun by repeatedly pushing it from below.

How enviable--No, outrageous!

"Oi oi, Soruna, your valuable dress will be full of hair. Moreover, what would you do if you stink of beast?"
"I hate uncle who says such thing *desuwa*."

Ossan made a rude remark like usual, but lady Soruna curtly refuses Ossan by "Pun", rather than "Tsun", matching her childish gestures.
Ossan is asking for support from the baron, but...

"This is, what a lovely child. Is the appearance up until now a magic?"

The baron lightly ignores Ossan's word, and asks. There is no blaming tone in his words. Rather, it strangely feels pure. I'll leave Ossan to Hayuna-san, and concentrate on the baron.

"I'm very sorry. I've heard a lot about how nobles find beastkin unpleasant, so I considered to at least make her looks like human."

Even though it's my own excuse, it's extremely noncommittal. Normally, you won't even bring her before thinking of disguising with magic.

"I'm sorry that you had to mind that. However, I didn't know that dogkin girl was this cute. I've only seen them at the royal capital and arena, and they all look fearsome like wild beasts. I'll have to revise my thinking with this."

The baron's eyes are fixed to Pochi who's being cuddled by the daughter.

"By the way, Satou-dono."
"What is it?"
"I too want to pat the head of this dog girl-san, may I?"

Pochi shakes her head down while being hugged by the daughter.
I nod at the baron after getting Pochi's permission.

"Oh, isn't it fluffy! Her hair is so nice."
"Besides, she smells really nice. Is this fruits smell? I don't know such natural perfume like this."

Hmm? Fruits smell?
I asked Arisa who's next to me in low voice.

"Mia made sachets filled with fruits peels, and put it together with our clothes."

I see, I don't know well, but it's something like pot-pourri I guess.
I did know that Mia was collecting fruits peels, but I had surely thought that it was for snacks during midnight when she's hungry. I have to be careful not to say this out loud. I would be made to [Seiza] again.

Our meeting with the baron family has unexpectedly ended with cozy feeling, but at that time, rapid development is occurring in the forest.

Even though the baron army should have been advantageous, suddenly victims from their side greatly increase together with the victims from goblin's side. Furthermore, the people who haven't made contact with the enemy are also falling victim one by one. Did the enemy have set up trap from the beginning?
Speaking of something strange, 10 split body had appeared near the main demon body and then, they flew around aimlessly on top of both forces.

I've thought that it might be using poison, but when I check on their status, I understand the cause.

Great majority of the soldiers are suffering with [Confusion], and [Enraged] condition.
I see, now I understand why Arisa had said, "Despised mind magic" before. It's a standard magic in game, but there's probably few magic that could compare to magic that has no means to be opposed, yet very effective when used against groups.
I'm sure that this method was also used to annihilate the large thieves group.

Part 25 - Battle of Muno City (3)

Satou's here. A friend of mine who was at his wit's end with job-hunting got caught up in a suspicious seminar, supporting it until he was on the verge of financial disaster.

The history of brainwashing is old. It also happens in the parallel world, but the method is a bit different.

◇

Thanks to Pochi, we've become closer to the baron family, and with Ossan's help, I'm checking various things with the baron, but...

"Then, you didn't issue order to collect congratulatory gifts from the people?"
"Of course. I've heard from the consul that this year we have bad harvest. If we do such things, the people would starve."

In fact, the people are abandoning the children and the elderly.

"Do you know that every village is selling their people to the extent that merchants even avoid them?"
"Fumu, I can't say that every village is prosperous, but we aren't collecting tax to the point that they would starve. And this year, in accordance to consul's suggestion, we should have had shared food to them though?"

The villagers that I've met are all thin, from the serf to the village head. I don't think that the village head is embezzling food.

"There was a girl who jumped out in front of our carriage today. The coachman said that carriages were not to be stopped even if it would kill the civilian who got ran over, is that true?"
"Unfortunately, that's the truth."

Oh, he's affirming it.
However, the baron's face turns gloomy. It totally doesn't look like an attitude of, "Commoners are garbage."

"Satou-sama, there's a reason for that. The year before the last, the carriage that my sister and me got on had crashed into a child. We immediately got off the carriage and went to help the child, but we were surrounded in an instant and almost kidnapped."
"Are you talking about the time we meet? Weren't the children and the people who surrounded you parts of thieves group called Muno Rebel and lurked in the city? It was the consul who told me later that they were thieves though."
"You were wonderful that time."

I'm ignoring the daughter and hero who start to flirt. Moreover, according to the daughter, the same situation happened again for five times afterward. The daughters had only directly

involved in the same incident twice, the rest happened to the maids and high ranking officials. Particularly for the last incident involving a high-ranking official, his carriage was deliberately toppled by an attack from the side.
That's strange, although they might have been exterminated already, there is no one who's affiliated with organization called Muno Rebel in this whole city. Of course, since there are underworld people here, it's hard to judge if they're thieves by just looking at their Reward and Punishment, but there isn't anyone who's affiliated with [Thief].

"Is the immigration tax a suggestion from the consul too?"
"Actually, there were incidents where this territory's children and girls from villages got abducted and forced to become slaves in other territories. Per suggestion of the consul, it's decided to put heavy tax on people who aren't legal slave traders or don't have permit from the village head to prevent the crime."

So it was out of good will huh? Any noble wouldn't want their population decrease, so there's probably that utility aspect too.

"Come to think of it, I didn't see soldiers or knights on the gate?"
"Umu, we've received appeal from villagers and merchants about the increasing victims from thieves, so we've sortied the whole army to subjugate them. Since the consul has said that there'd be no problem even if the thieves attack if the gate is closed shut, I approved the plan."

Okay, doubt.
Didn't he just said that thieves had attacked the carriage inside the city earlier.
Right now, there aren't even 10 soldiers inside the city. There's only person who is a knight. The remaining force is too few, even if the whole army go for subjugation. To be frank, it's unthinkable.

"Is it fine with the thieves who are hiding in the city?"
"It's fine since the consul has said that it's fine."
"Moreover, no matter how many thieves are attacking, I'll exterminate them with this holy sword."

The fake hero follows up the baron's words. After that, he begins to flirt with the young lady again, I ignore it.

The consul huh. He's quite trusted.

Hmm? Now that you mention it, the one who everyone calls [The Consul] could only mean that.
I search the consul on the map. For the whole territory, not just the city.

"If possible, I'd like to meet that consul-sama in person."
"But of course, he's just a bit busy now. He's working in a separate building next to this one. After he's finished with the job, he probably would show up his face."

The separate building huh, there's no consul there. That means, the one they call consul is

most likely the demon.
I'll ask his name for the time being and check if he's in a jail or not.

"Everyone has been calling him the consul since awhile ago, but I'm wondering what is the name of the consul?"
"Fumu, what was it I wonder? I'm sorry, I always call him consul so I forget the name. It's one of those things taken with ages."

I try to ask the daughter.

"I should have called him with his name during my childhood, but I often call him consul these days, so I don't remember it."
"I'm sorry, I've always called him consul from the beginning, so I don't know."

The maids don't know either.
Situation like this is normally impossible. It'd be understandable if the one they're forgetting is a person with not much presence, but it's too unnatural that no one knows the name of a top administrative person.

And the strangest thing is--

I look at the people who have answered my questions.

--There's no one who thinks it's unnatural.

◇

"Hmm? What's that?"

The fake hero looks at the opposite side of the balcony and asks a question.
There are a lot of doors as tall as a person leading to the balcony in this room, and they're all open. Since the room is at the top floor of a building on elevated ground, it should have been cold, but it seems that the air flow between the room and outside is blocked with magic called Air Curtain.
It's not only blocked, I wonder what's this strong feeling of being locked.

And, the view on the balcony presents the entire center street from the castle gate to the main gate straight unobstructed.
What the hero wanted to say is probably about the black shadow that look like people looking like grains gushing out at the central street.

Did something happen?

One of the maid says, "I will ask about it", and leaves the room.
From what I see on the map, about 10 skeletons have appeared at two graveyard sites each.
Of course, all the demon's split bodies are in the forest beside the one in the separate building.

I searched the city and found the culprit. There are people who can use [Ghost Magic] near the skeletons.
Since those people don't have abnormal status, they probably have been bribed by the demon who posed as the consul to cause uproars.

It seems that the skeletons are just goading the citizens, they don't kill them even though they're attacking. Yet, a lot of people have noticed the skeletons and they're running from them toward the main gate or the castle gate.
It probably can't be helped considering the history of this city, but there's no doubt that it's also because there are certain people who are leading them among the people.

The others are also coming to the balcony as if lured by the hero.

Next, we are also going to follow the others to the balcony.
Arisa is pulling my sleeves.

"Hey, don't you think that the consul is the one behind this?"
"I do. Incidentally, that guy is a demon."
"De, demon? Your source?"

Dang, I was lost in thought so I answered without thinking.
Well, it's fine.

"There is no consul in this castle. Instead, there's a level 1 split body of the demon."
"Level 1? That's impossible, the main body must be close by."

I might as well tell her the situation.

"The main body is in the forest near the city."
"Wha"
"The 1000-strong baron army was fighting with 3000 demi-goblins there, but they were annihilated due to them killing each other roused by the demon's mind magic. The other 10 Splitters are in the forest creating zombies. There are around 100 zombies marching toward Muno city in group. Furthermore, the ones hiding in the forest are turning the thieves and beasts into zombies."
"Seriously?"
"Seriously serious."

It's been a while since I use that phrase.
I think I've told Arisa about the map and search... but maybe she has thought that it's only effective for hundreds of meters.
I didn't tell her that it could cover the whole territory since I didn't want her to guess that it's a unique skill.
Oops, I need to tell her a bit more. I convey the details about the demon in succession.

"Th, then, were you going to nonchalantly march into the place where there's a level 30 demon alone?"

Arisa raises her eyebrows and draws near me.

"No well, I'm already doing that, and the main body is in the forest right?"
"Did you forget about the skeleton guy back then? Splitter is split body right? What would you do if the main body has the ability to change place with the split body."

I intend to defeat it when that happens.

"Well, we have a holy sword for that time. Since there are the fake hero and his friends."
"If you're depending on such people, you should have brought Liza-san and the other along too, we could do something even if we're attacked."
"Demons are well versed in magic attack, so I'm worried that Liza and the other would get manipulated."
"Mou, didn't I say that rather than us slaves, you should prioritize yourself more!"

I pacify Arisa who's angry from her worry.
During time like this, I should avert the subject, and steer off the argument.

"Arisa, even if the demon is the mastermind, don't you think that everyone's condition is strange?"
"About that, it's most likely caused by the demon's mind magic."
"But, no one is suffering with abnormal status you know?"
"That's the part, that's the reason why mind magic is forbidden."

Come to think of it, that demon is the first thing I've seen which has mind magic since Arisa.

"If you repeatedly use mind magic like Trust, cognitive inhibition (Jamming), and common sense manipulation (Lurk) for a long time, it's possible to brainwash people."
"Brainwash?"
"Let's see, if you use magic instilling [Crows are white] to people, eventually when you ask [What's the color of crows?], they'll answer [White]. Lies could become truth if you form easy to believe groundworks with magic. Though of course, there are individual differences."

Rather than fantasy, it's more like some kind of a new religion.

"Is there any way to undo it?"
"That would be difficult. It could be done if we spend our time patiently. It's impossible to remove it with magic in one blow."

It seems there are magic to cancel consciousness manipulation, but it looks like it's hard for magic that has distorted your sense.
Even though there seems to be a way to brainwash in reverse, it would take time.

Part 26 - Battle of Muno City (4)

Satou's here. If you travel to a foreign country without learning the custom there, you're getting yourself into trouble.

It's a bit more severe in a parallel world.

◇

I hear Pochi saying, "Bones are chasing after people nodesu.", while still she's still hugged by the daughter.

"Bones? Are there skeletons inside the city?"
"Yeah, it seems there are some people who could use ghost magic. The elderly are probably scared of undead because of their experiences with the No Life King's army encirclement during the time of marquis Muno."
"It can't be helped then. It's not like we can help them from here."
"Since there are only 20 skeletons inside the city, I'll do something about them with Remote Arrow, thought it might be futile. I won't aim at the ghost magic users since they would likely die if hit."

I come out to the balcony using different door than the baron and the others have used.

The magic, Magic Arrow which Remote Arrow is derived from is written in the beginner magic book that I've bought.

It is said that [『Magic Arrow』 is the basic and ultimate of magic. The more you master it, the further away it could travel, and the more you could release. If you master it to the limit, and have unlimited magic power, you could destroy the entire army of the whole country with 『Magic Arrow』].
Of course, it's probably exaggerated, but still, when I, who have skill level 10 on it, use it, I could use my map to lock-on the enemies and shoot them. Since the power of one magic arrow is still far weaker than a punch, one arrow could only defeat one level 5 enemy at most. I could shoot 1-125 arrows at once. It consumes at least 10 magic power, and the consumption increases as the number of arrows increases and exceeds certain range. To be frank, it looks to be inferior compared to something like explosion or fireball magic as an anti-army magic.

"Wa, wait, don't tell me you're going to use Remote Arrow?"
"Yeah, I'll shoot it secretly of course."

I stretch a short cane from the position where the baron couldn't see and generate magic arrows to aim at the skeletons. The arrows look like they're made from glasses.

The marks that signify the skeletons on my map are followed by lock-on marks that look like the ones you usually see in aircraft fighter simulators.
Lock-on mark is nice. No matter how many time I see it, it stimulates my male instinct.

I set the trajectory of the arrows so it would not enter the field of view of the baron and the others, and launch them. Soon enough, the skeletons in the map are annihilated. Magic sure is convenient huh.

"Hey, hey."

Arisa's voice is trembling.
Dang, is this kind of long-distance shooting normally impossible?

"Don't tell me you could only shoot 20? How could you think of fighting a level 30 enemy with that. Know your place."

Her way of speaking is unusually prickly considering she's Arisa.
Was the number of arrow too low. Looking at the arrow's power, I could easily win just by shooting 20 arrows, but I wonder that since the opponent is a demon, it'd be easy for it to resist elementary magic.

The arrow's number depends on the skill level according to the textbook, so should I just tell her half of my level? Though it's not like I have to keep it a secret, I could just tell Arisa [Hide it] if she looks like she's going to run her mouth. If level 10 could generate 125 arrows then I should tell her that the level is the same as her mind magic skill level, but since that's the level of an expert, if I say that the level is 4 then being able to generate 50 arrows shouldn't be strange. 10 arrows are enough to defeat the opponent even if it has magic defense anyway, so this excuse should be good enough I guess?

"I could shoot 50 arrows at most. If I'm attacking while drinking MP recovery potion, I could probably defeat it by repeating about 10 times right?"
"Right huh~ if you shoot that many, it's alright huh."

Arisa goes back to the room without saying anything, I pretend not to see her stomping the floor, and she glares at me from inside the room. Tears come out of her dauntless eyes.
The baron and the others are still viewing the city on the balcony. It doesn't seem like they would pay attention here.

"You, by any chance, are you hiding your level?"

Huh? So it was a leading question?
I wonder where I did wrong, I thought that it shouldn't be a problem since firing 50 arrows with each consuming 1 MP should meant that I had 50 MP which should be good enough for level 12.
Well, this is just right for coming out I guess.

"Yes, I'm hiding it. Wasn't it Arisa who told me to hide it?"
"Right, that's right, but to think you could hide level on top of skill."
"But you've guessed well, I only need 50 MP for 50 arrows, there's no strange point in it right?"

Arisa's face freezes, and she lets out a sigh while putting her hand on her forehead. She

pauses for a bit, and scolds me in a whisper that sounds like it's been squeezed out. I feel like I'm always scolded by Arisa.

"This careless man! Know this world's common sense better."
"I understand that I've failed, but which one I did wrong? Even the magic books say that the arrow could be shot infinitely you know?"
"That's only the『Theory』. Right now the best magician which is also the founder of this country can only shoot 49 at most."

It's that few huh. Let's only shoot 30 in front of people from now on.

"I could just say that one is an error."
"Not only that, it's impossible to only use 1 MP for 1 arrow."
"It uses at least 10 MP for each shoot. It's just that I only need the same amount of MP until the number of arrow reach 10."
"That's the strange part. An attack magic with the same efficiency as magic arrow among light magic use at least 15MP for each shoot. According to Nana and magic art scientist that I'm acquainted with, it generally needs 5-10MP per shoot. Furthermore you don't even use a long cane, but a cheap short cane that doesn't have magic amplifying or magic power usage reduction effect, if anyone tell me about it, I would have thought that they're just bragging."
"Then, let's make it so it need 10 MP for each shoot."

There's so much difference huh. Then I have to pretend running out of gas after shooting 12 arrows in front of people. This is a bit troublesome.
It seems she doesn't like my answer, she seizes my robe and rub her head on my stomach while saying, "What do you mean by 'then'~". Please stop it since it plainly painful.

"And also! The range is strange too! The 49 arrows magician that I've said earlier is able to shoot enemies 2 kilometers away, but that's only in grasslands with good views. I've never heard anything like sniping enemies with pinpoint accuracy in this kind of urban area."
"The sniping could be done integrated with the map."
"Ceh, unique skill. I've thought that you're plain, but you have such features hidden. I can't make light of you indeed."

Although she's letting out some questionable remarks, it seems that she has seen through my high level, so it's turned out alright.

"So yeah, it's like that, I've also hid my level, I'm actually high level."
"I understand, I won't ask the detail. I mostly understand from the talk just now."

She did huh, as expected of Arisa. Let's ask in detail next time.
But, it was good that I didn't tell her that I actually could shoot 125 arrows. It looks like she'd feel bad somewhere rather than relieved. She'd think that shooting one arrow more than the best record is a margin of error. Transported people are generally cheat anyway.
However, I was made to promise to sleep together with her for 1 week as a compensation for all her worries up until now. I've firmly said, "No *ecchi*.", to make sure, but seems like it'd be difficult to hold the virtue firmly for 1 week.

◇

Yet, the citizens are still gathering near the main gate and the castle gate. Even though the skeletons have been eliminated, do the instigators remain there?

"I, it's terrible! Undead monsters are attacking!"

Butler-san from earlier barged into the room with different expression on his face.

"Calm yourself, Meyer. If it's the Skeletons that have appeared inside the city, it looks like they've been exterminated by the townspeople."
"No, it's different. Swarms of zombies have appeared from the giant forest."
"My, it's scary desuwa."

Are you really scared, daughter-san.

"It's alright, Soruna-hime. I will protect you."
"Yes, my hero-sama."

I'm leaving this stupid couple alone.

The baron and the others go to the balcony that faces the forest, and check the condition over the wall.

"They're coming faster than expected huh. Let's quickly escape from the city. We're too outnumbered. Your magic could do something with hundreds of zombies, but if there are thousands of them, it's impossible right."
"Wouldn't it be easy if we just smash them steadily from inside the wall?"
"There's no way the demon would wait for that. There must be its minions among the people who will lead them to open the gate from the inside, no mistake 'bout it."

Looks like Arisa's prediction is correct. People are fleeing from the main gate. Seems that someone had opened it from inside. I tell Arisa about that matter.

"The demon and its group are heading here."
"Right, it's finally the decisive battle huh."
"Before that, the splitter would get here first. The knight Eral from back then is together with it."
"Who's that?"
"It's the knight who was going to kill Hayuna-san when she was held hostage."
"Uwah, that guy huh. Then won't he cut you if you attack the splitter?"
"Perhaps. I'll prevent it."
"Let's leave it to Pochi. If it's that girl, she could handle attacks from that level of knight easily. You'll be watching the baron's family for any chance of ambush."
"How about I neutralize the splitter with a knockdown?"
"Un, since physical attack might not work on the disguise, I'll do it instead."
"Understood."

I call Pochi, give her a dagger from the Item Box and brief her about the situation. By situation, I only said, "If the knight attack, ward him off." to her.

And then, as if waiting for our preparation to complete, the door opens without even a knock.

"Baron! Consul-sama is coming in."
"Sir Eral. Call baron-sama properly, not me."

Baron comes back from the balcony and see the two who have entered.

"Ah, we've been waiting for you consul. It's terrible, undead monsters are attacking from outside the wall. Maybe No Life King has been revived?"
"Baron-sama, I've arranged a high-speed carriage. Please go together with hero-sama outside of the baron's territory."
"But then, the people will..."
"It's alright, I'm going to stay in this castle and do something about it."

It'd be troubling if it gets too close to the baron. I should start soon.

"Then, you'll turn all the citizens into undead monsters in the end right, Short Horn demon consul-dono."

Arisa attacks the consul (demon) who turns around with startled face with shock wave.
The consul (demon) helplessly crumples to the floor.
Its figure is that of dark skin with bat wing, truly the figure of a demon.

But, even after seeing that figure, knight Eral shouts.

"You bastard! What are you doing to consul-sama!"

Knight Eral draws his sword.

The split body (splitter) rises.

The daughter screams when she sees the split body.

And the baron and ossan who can't stand up.

The fake hero covers the daughter on his back and pulls out his sword from the blue sheath.

And Pochi, with her dagger, skillfully wards off knight Eral's great sword aimed at me.

With Space Grasp skill, I've understood the things happening in this room.

Right when knight's Eral great sword get stuck on the floor, I kick the blade and break it. Since knight Eral's big body is a nuisance, I knock him out unconscious just like that.

At the present, it doesn't seem like there's any ambush from the baron family.

Arisa has taken out a long cane before I knew it and point it to the demon.
It seems like she can't make her move since the fake hero is fighting the split body (splitter).

"Uuh~ since they're moving around the place, I can't aim with Light Dagger."

Really? They're stopping aplenty you know?

The split body (splitter) stops the fake hero's sword with its claws. It's strong even though it's just a level 1.

"O holy sword Gjallarhorn! Now is the time to grant me the power to defeat this demon!"

I almost burst into laughter unintentionally. Of all things, it has to be that name huh.
The fake hero cuts the split body (splitter) with his magic sword which lets out indigo light.
He's succeeded in cutting the claws, but the demon is still going strong.

Part 27 - Battle of Muno City (5)

Satou's here. Fake and Real, there's this TV program about recognizing the real one, but in a parallel world, since there are skills and magic, it's difficult for the impostor and the identifier.

◇

"Gjallarhorn he said? Don't tell me, it's the real thing?"

Arisa is astonished.
Is that twisting holy sword famous. I'll ask what kind of anecdote it has next time.
The fake hero's sword is also named Gjallarhorn when I see it with AR, however the type is not of holy sword, but magic sword. The explanation is the same as the one I have even though it's just a magic tool. Needless to say, it's a counterfeit. It's only as strong as a normal iron sword, and the appearance is also just a normal straight sword.

"Hero, you dare to strike me with the fake sword I've given to you! Foolish."
"Shut up, demon! Where did you put the real consul!"

I see, so they interpret it like that.

I'd like to stop doing this farce and deal with it as soon as possible, since there's a high possibility that the split body (splitter) is connected with the real body. If I eliminate it with overwhelming force, the real body could be cautious and conceal itself somewhere. It'd be annoying if that happens.
Looks like Pochi is impatient with the fake hero's fighting, she's pulling the hem of my robe.

"Can Pochi fight too?"

Even though the opponent is a demon, it's just level 1. From the look of thing, it's stronger than a normal level 1, but Pochi should be able to neutralize it while unhurt.

"Alright. Be careful since the enemy can use magic."

The demon screams even though it shouldn't have heard my word. However, the effect of the magic doesn't materialize.

"Tou! Nano desu."

Pochi who shouts out her fighting spirit slash through the split body with her dagger. She aimed at the shoulder like she's always doing with thieves.
And then, right after the split body (splitter) HP becomes zero, it turns into black dust and disappears.

Pochi sure is strong.

Or rather, the splitter's HP is even less than thieves' so it's over in one hit.

"Amazing desuwa. Pochi-chan."
"To think she's this strong even though she's so cute! The beastkin who has saved Toruma is Pochi-dono right!"

The baron family are praising Pochi.
However, Pochi's ears are fallen. She's coming toward me with heavy step as if she's a remnant of a defeated army. And then, she looks at me with upturned eyes. Little tears are coming out of the corner of her eyes.

"I'm sorry, nano desu. I've killed the dark person."

Wasn't it similar with the gargoyle we had defeated back then?
Perhaps, she might have thought that she's also not allowed to kill strange-looking things.
Though I guess it's also ambiguous for me. I don't want to kill people or demi-humans, but I'm fine with obliterating demons. I guess it's because how they look after all?

I should have dealt with it using Remote Arrow than having Pochi shows such face.

"It's alright, Pochi. Thank you for protecting everyone."

I hug Pochi close and comfort her.

After this disturbance is over, I'll make her eat extraordinarily delicious steak until she gives up eating it, "I can't eat anymore nodesu~."

◇

"Right, we have to save the real consul!"
"That's right desuwa, I wonder where is the consul being held."

Even though it transformed in front of their eyes, the interpretation still became like this. How should I persuade them.

I whispered to Arisa to give her permission. Many records of mind magic that have been successfully used are appearing on the log. It's the same magic used by the demon for making people believe easily. They say to fight fire with fire.

"The demon earlier is the real consul you know."
"What stupid things are you saying?"
"There's no way it's true."
"That's right desuwa."

No one believes the facts spoken by Arisa. Did they resist it?
I should follow up.

"Everyone has been manipulated by the demon's magic. As a proof, no one remembers even

the name of the consul right?"
"That is so, but."
"But, if consul-sama isn't here."
"To think that consul-sama was really a demon. Even though he was the first person who recognized me as a hero..."

Oh? They're accepting my opinion now even though they readily denied Arisa's words? Even though the contents of what I said weren't much different. I wonder if this is the effect of negotiation or persuasion skills?

"Then, do you remember since when was the consul appointed?"
"I don't remember. Was it 10 years ago? No, there was gramp at that time. When did gramp disappear?"
"He was there when Karina came into age."
"Rondol-sama wasn't the only butler. Since when I wonder, the people who were attending here have mostly gone."

Butler-san is also going along with the baron's confusion. Looks like their manipulated memory has been slightly ripped apart from the information and it's starting to come back to them.

I find an underling of the duke in the gaol, and confirm the name to the baron.

"Baron-sama, are you familiar with a honor-viscount called Nina Rottol?"
"Umu, I do. She's a consul candidate which was sent to our territory along with the letter from the lord duke 5 years ago."

He answered smoothly. And then, baron's expression harden after he finished answering.

"Why was it candidate. Our territory already had a consul. But, viscount Nina died of accidental death and I asked the consul from previous generation to take her place..."
"Perhaps, the demon utilized the time when Nina-sama was going to be inaugurated as the consul and used mind magic for manipulation."

However, no one questions why do I have those informations. Unexpectedly, they might be thinking that I'm a subordinate of the duke. Maybe it's the effect of deception skill.

"To tell you the truth, I've got information from the intelligence shop inside the city back then, it's said that Nina-sama and priest-sama have been thrown into the dungeon by the demon."
"How terrible! Viscount Nina! We have to save her immediately."

Baron-sama instructs butler-san to save them each.
Now then, the domestic affairs of this territory should manage somehow with this. I pray that the person called Nina-san is an able person.

◇

Then next, I have to deal with the flood of people who rush out to the gate now. The best way to do it is by asking Arisa with her mind magic, but there should be agitators planted by the demon inside the people. It doesn't seem like they have some strange assassination skills, but I'm afraid that they would cause panic to the crowd and make them stampede her to death.

It won't be a problem if I go with her, but it's certain that the demon would quickly try to go back here from the forest after the split body died. I don't want to leave this place for the sake of thoroughly deal with it. I could aim it from anywhere with Remote Arrow, but if by any chance it could defense against it, it'd be hard to shoot again, so I don't want to leave this place for the sake of ensuring the next attack.

Of course, I have no plan of sending only Arisa and/or Pochi to the crowd alone. I'm sorry for the citizens, but I put the safety of Arisa and Pochi more than the citizen's.

Let's ask the fake hero to take the full brunt here.
It's originally his role anyway, let's make the people from baron's side to work hard for this part.

"Hauto-dono, if you want yourself to be called hero from now on, I'll have you show the proof. Give courage to the people who have been chased by the undead and gathered in front of the castle's gate."
"I understand. I have no intention of being used by the demon to the end. I will become a hero with my own power. I'll become a man befitting of this Gjallarhorn."

The fake hero replied my high-handed words with passionate speech.

"It's wonderful, my hero-sama."
"Ah, my love. You're still calling me hero."
"Yes, ever since you save me from the mob, you've always been my hero desuwa."
"Then, let's go together! To calm the citizens!"

And then, the two leave the room together, is that fine? To take the ojou-sama before the wild citizens.

"Satou-dono, the citizens in front of the castle gate is being taken care of, but what should we do about the monsters outside the wall."

You're asking that to an outsider, baron.

"Cousin-dono, there's no way we could win against such army. Let's get away with the high-speed carriage that the consul earlier, no, was it demon, has said."
"I can't do that Toruma, even though I'm called useless, I'm still the lord of this territory. There's no way I would escape and throw away the citizens."

Even Hayuna-san doesn't know what to do, she's holding Mayuna-san while looking very anxious.
What Ossan has said is normal view, but that carriage has been used by the hero's

companions to escape. It looks like there's a hidden passage for escaping. There are a lot of zombies at the exit of that passage, but I let them to do something about it themselves.

"Shouldn't there be weapons or magic tools for defense in a castle this big?"
"They existed during the time of Marquis, but they were destroyed during the incident 20 years ago. When the territory became of Baron, there were many plans for revitalizing, but they were postponed because we're not fighting against other country."
"Then do you have tactical scrolls?"
"We had been given them from Toruma's house, but by the suggestion of the consul, they were sold to buy food that were to be distributed to the citizens."

Darn you demon, so thoroughly prepared.
Still there's a person who would buy tactical scrolls which should be for war. I wonder if it was other noble?

"Then, please signal the army that have came out for thieves subjugation to come back somehow. Let's keep the citizens inside the castle until the army come back."

The army has been annihilated, but the baron doesn't know such thing and I don't intend to tell him. For the time being, the citizens should become less anxious if they're withdrawn inside the castle.

The baron tells the maid about the matter to signal the army to come back.

"I understand, the inside of the castle fortress is the safest. Let's evacuate the citizens there. The hero should have calmed down the citizens before the castle gate. I will go there and tell the people that I'm accepting them to the castle. People should feel relieved to see a coward like me remain right?"
"Alright then cousin-dono. I'll go with my family and the servants to the fortress first and make preparations there."
"Thank you, Toruma. Please persuade people who have been freed from the gaol to remain in the fortress."
"I understand. Satou-dono, you lot are coming too."

Baron and co leave the room while saying so. I tell Ossan who's late that we will remain here.
The maids bring manservants to carry the fainted knight Eral away on their shoulders.

"Then, what would you do? It'd be impossible even with your magic since the opponents are too many right? I'm not able to use ranged light magic, so putting aside an opponent that's simply strong, I don't have enough power to fight against so many enemies you know?"
"It's fine, reinforcements are coming."

I tell Arisa who has wondering face that the giants from the forest depth are coming here.

"Something like giants, where are they appearing from."
"They have a village deep inside the forest."
"That's not it, aren't they the demon's forces?"

"They're probably different, it seems that the second daughter that knight Eral was looking for, requested for the reinforcement. She's together with them."

I point at the forest while saying so. If you see it closely, the trees are shaking.

Looks like the zombies have reached the main gate, and the crowds are rushing from the main gate to the castle gate. Fortunately the zombies are slow, so there's no citizen who get caught up and killed. Please pardon me real zombie movie. I'm weak against gross thing.

I stealthily deal with fast zombies of beast or birds mixed in the zombies flock with remote arrows.

Since the forest trees are shaking awfully, I check on the giants' conditions which have became [Confusion]. Please no fighting against each other happening to even the giants.

However, there's a more pressing matter than that.

"Arisa, something bad has happened."
"What is it now, did the demon lord attack too?"

That one might be emotionally better for me.

"Liza and the others are closing in the zombies on the main gate."

Part 28 - The Girls' Battles

Lulu

Hello, Lulu here.
What should I do. Liza-san is acting strange since awhile ago.

"Call the village chief!"
"Who are ya. I ain't getting ordered by a beastkin."

Liza-san strikes the ground with her spear wrapped in cloth.
Even her wagon driving to this village was rough. I think she really wanted to go together with master like Arisa after all?

The villager-san with big body is trying his best to oppose Liza-san, but it seems that only his word is big without courage. His feet and voice are shaking.

Thankfully, a boy is leading a gentle-looking man here while running. That kid was the kid who ran toward the village earlier. It looks like he's called the village chief.

"Well then, what exactly is your demand? As you can see, our is a poor village, we're short in food let alone treasures."

Exactly like chief-san has said, the children, and the man earlier look famished.

"We don't need treasures or food. My great lord desires stones that look like this. Prepare 100 of it immediately."

Mou, Liza-san, it's already completely not on the level of negotiation. Nana-san too, please don't only look from the side and do something about it.

I desperately try convey it with my eyes, but it doesn't reach Nana-san. She looks over here and tilts her neck. Mou! It's unfair to be that cute on top of being a beauty.

I turn my head at the back to look at Tama-chan and Mia-san who are the remaining ray of hope, but....

Mia-san! Please don't play around with Tama-chan! Moreover, isn't the string you're using to play the matching one that master has bought! Ah, Tama-chan's nails are, aah, mou!

When I'm agonizing over that, the negotiation is over. Village chief-san is directing the children and the young people carrying baskets and the like toward the river.

To think they're doing the collecting after that, what kind of magic did Liza-san use?

Tama

Muu~n. Liza is tingling nyan.

That end-sentence Arisa's taught has became a habit. What to do, if I say it out loud, master would worry.

Seems she's worried for master who has gone to the place of that monster called noble or something.

Liza and Arisa are such worrywarts.

Even though it's alright, since master is the strongest of the strong. No matter what kind of monster appears, swoosh, he'd move, zudodon, he'd beat it.

Flop, I lie down and Mia hang a string in front of my eyes.

How rude. I'm not the same Tama who's always, always lured.

Chorochoro.

Piku.

Choro. Chorochoro.

Endure. I'm the onee-san. I must endure here.

Shururu~n.

Tou♪

Hah ah, I've been entangled in the string when I noticed.
Mia's string technique must be the secret art of fairies, no doubt.

Village Chief

Good grief, I shouldn't have have married into the village chief's house.

I've grown used with sending away thieves, brown-nosing the tax collector, and letting off the territorial army's coercion though.

The eyes of that scalekin are like fangs. I thought that I'd be eaten from the head.

Moreover, when she struck the spear on the ground earlier, the cloth came loose. My heart was grasped just looking at that. That's a magic spear for certain. Back then, the merchant that came--I knew that he was actually a thief in disguise, and he let everyone off if I just gave him offering--had said.

There's a demi-human scarier than monsters hunting thieves on the highway.

It was a scalekin wielding a magic spear glowing red accompanied by two beastkin subordinates. It seems they could tear through any kind of trap, and crush ambush no matter where it was hidden as if they could see it.

I was trembling in fear thinking that she would consider this village which was doing transaction with thieves the same as them, but it looks like that's not it.

The girls tells us to give her 100 pebbles.

"Even though you say that you want pebbles, it's not like pebbles are our local specialty products so... "
"No more dialogs. It can be gathered at the river ahead. It's the same red pebbles. I will wait until noon. Prepare them immediately."

I ask the kid who's looking here curiously, it seems that the pebbles are lying around the riverbank and the riverbed. If it's not a rare thing, let's quickly gather 100 of it and have them get out of the village.

I order the children and the serfs to collect the pebbles at the riverbank. It could probably finish in 1-2 hours if there are 20 people.
To prevent angering the quick tempered girls, I have to be here until after the pebbles are collected.

Ach, my stomach hurts.

Lulu

"Okay. No. No. Okay..."

Tama is selecting the pebbles in front of me.
The villagers have gathered more than 100 pebbles after 1 hour, but they're not only bringing the right one, there are also red stones that only look beautiful mixed in. They've only gathered around 30-40% of the intended stones.

"Achoo."

I turn toward the sneeze sounds, and see a girl with violet lips and her whole body trembling . When I look closer, her hem and feet are wet. They're probably entering the river in this wintry sky to look for the stones.

Apparently they've been going to the river 2-3 times to collect stones for Tama-chan to see. Everyone looks thin and seems to not have stamina. I'm worried that they might catch cold, suffer from pneumonia and die.

That's right! Let's treat them with risotto that master has taught me some time ago. That should be good for warming and filling them up. Master has said that we're free to use ingredients in the wagon, so there's no problem with it.
However, the pot is too small maybe.

"Na, ma'am, Liza-san. I'd like to treat everyone from the village with risottto, is it fine?"

I've almost said Nana-san like usual out of habit. I'd like to be called ma'am too someday.

Of course the husband is--

"Lulu? We can't use the food without permission from master... No, we've been given permission have we. However, if the ones eating are us then it's fine, but aren't you interpreting the permission too broad by treating other people?"
"No, I think there's no problem if we treat the people cooperating in collecting the pebbles."
"I understand. Na, no, ma'am, how about it?"
"Execution is permitted."

Looks like Liza-san almost called her Nana too. It's easy to be mistaken there right.
Nana-san is the same like always.

With Liza-san's help, we make stove by lining stones, and put the pot on the fire. At first the villagers are looking at us suspiciously, but after the smell of the boiled cereal spreads in the air, they begin to surround while watching us in a distance. I put assorted cereal and vegetables, small slices of dried meat, and lastly cut the cheese in long thin shaving and melt it, it's complete.

I put the risotto in bowls that Nana-san has asked the village chief-san to prepare. I pass the bowl to the children who bring the pebbles, they look shocked.

Ara? I wonder if they don't like cheese?

"Do you dislike cheese?"
"I've never eaten one."
"It's delicious you know? Eat carefully since it's hot."

When I said that, the child repeatedly look at the bowl and my face and finally look to village chief-san to ask for the decision.

"Even if you give us such luxurious thing..."
"There is no problem."
"It's thanks for these red pebbles."

Nana-san quickly answered vilage chief-san's question. After village chief-san approves, the children begin to sip the bowl. I forgot to pass the spoons.

"Hot, delicious."
"It's warming me up."
"I don't get to eat this even during festivals."
"Un, delicious."

The children are eating vigorously as if their mouths are burning.
The adults have also gathered before I'm aware of it. There's also a person who said, "Oy, give father one too.", among them. That's no good you know? Taking the children's shares.

"Hey, jou-chan. If I gather the pebbles, are you going to give me those porridges too?"
"Yes, it'll warm you up."

The adults begin to run toward the river after hearing me. Seeing that, the children give the bowl that has been licked clean back while saying thank you, and begin to run toward the river.

Err, I wonder how many people are there.

I'm worried if we could do it, but Nana-san negotiates with the village chief to allow us to use the kitchen in his house. We have plenty of the ingredients, and it looks like the village's housewives are going to help too.

Now, let's do our best to make the meal.

Part 29 - The Girls' Battles (2)

Tama

Meal~?

Risotto is tasty, but I think the meat that master grills are the best.

Always tasty steak of wolf meat~

Stir fried vegetables with chicken meat, more meat~

I want to eat grilled frogs again♪

What's tooooday's meal I won~ der~♪

...Nyu? Today's meal?

Nyu, nyunyu?

Ah!

I understand Liza's worry maybe.

As it is now, noon will pass, while master is still away~?

Unyu~
At that time, if I didn't use scissor for janken, I could had gone together...

Aah, today's lunch is.

The meat that master makes~~~!!

Nana

The reasoning circuit reports that the probability of completing the mission has broken through 100%.

On the command queue, there is no next directive given by master.
Let's go back to the normal routine.

Self-diagnostic.... No problem. There is no need for MP supplement--there should be no need to, but master's face floats in my mind. I wonder what is this loop in my logic circuit.

It's alright. I've learned that if I look at Pochi or Tama when this happens, the loop will be canceled.

Tama is rolling around while watching Lulu's cooking. She's very cute. Is this cat-rolling? Cat-doting? Unfortunately it seems there's no fitting vocabulary in my preset.

After I've finished delighting myself with Tama, the disorder with logic circuit is fixed, I move to the next sequence.

Diagnosing each individual member...

Mother is stable.

There's also no problem with Lulu who's currently cooking.

Tama is cute.

Liza is.... Error.

It seems Liza has been accumulating stress after she's separated with master.
This stress has something to do with that thing called nobles. They were the top elimination targets of the previous master. I've never seen one, but I could deduce that they're like monsters.

However, according to my logic, there is no chance that master would fall. He's the master who won complete victory against the strongest iron golem of that maze in the blink of an eye. Even if he fights against the army, he would probably come back unhurt.

I cannot understand the reason for Liza's accumulated stress, but I know the solution to relieve it.

"Liza, go to where the master is."
"But then, I will go against master's instruction."
"No, master's instructions are,『Give works to the villagers』,『Collect 100 red pebbles』, and 『We do not collect the pebbles ourselves』, only those three points. After we got the cooperation of the villagers, the mission's completion is only a matter of time. There is no problem even if Liza go to where master is."
"However, the wagon's guard..."
"What master wants to protect at all cost is not the wagon, but Lulu. I will stay to guard Lulu, so bring Mia and Tama along to aid master."

Liza hesitates for a bit, but then she goes to the city riding horse together with Tama and Mia. I go to Lulu to support her.

I am Nana. The seventh generation homonculus cultivated in the seventh adjustment tank.

Cooking, sleeping together, babysitting, shopping, inspecting workshop.
Even inside the library of the previous generations before No.7, there are no experience this varied.

I wonder what kind of experience I will have under master from now on.
That is, yes, I'm truly looking forward to it.

Tama

"Tama, Mia, let's go to master's place. Prepare in 30 seconds."
"Nn."
"A~ye."

Yay, today's lunch is going to be grilled meat that master makes.

Bururun, the horses are spirited too.

Looks like the horses want to eat master-made meal too.

I stand on the stool and put the saddle on.
I'm already used to it hum.

"Tama, the girdle of that saddle is loose. You'd fall like that."

Liza's check is harsh like always.

Liza

I lead Tama and Mia to leave the village.
If Nana didn't push me, I probably would be still feeling irritated while staying in the village. I have to thank her somehow next time.

Of course I know that master is strong.
He led the three of us who were nothing but drag through series of battles inside the labyrinth, and even taught us how to fight monsters.

However, nobles are different. They're not enemies that could be fought with simple power. Even my father who was the strongest in my tribe got deceived by nobles and fell into slavery regardless of his accumulated techniques.

"Liza~?"
"Ahead."

I pull myself together after hearing Tama's and Mia's voice. There are 10 cavalry soldiers a bit further away from the entrance of the village. They're not wearing full body armors like knight, but they're wearing breastplates like Tama and me and helmets. Their outfits are too uniform for mercenaries, their disciplines look good too. I wonder if they're with the army?

They're in the way.

Mia

"Let's force our way."
"Nn."

I nod to Liza's word, but isn't it impossible? It's impossible right, there are so many of those cavalries. What should we do? What should I do, it seems that Liza intends to break through the soldiers to the forest, but won't the horses get pushed down? They're going to

get pushed down right, I should somehow move them aside I guess? That's right! There should be a way to repel them.

It's the one from when I played magic with Arisa--

"■■■ ■■■ Water Cast"
"■■■ ■ ■ Balloon"

Thanks my smooth-talking practice with Satou, it feels that my chanting has become neat. It's become neat right?

I create water belts from the water on the water bags, and stretch them toward the soldiers. I make the magic that looks as if it's chasing something to [Evaporate].
The soldiers' route slightly shift since they're being pressured by something invisible.

Did it work? It worked! Arisa is amazing for arranging something like this for the sake of drying her wet hair. But, this spell for drying wet hair is a secret to Satou alright? It's a secret. I mean, I like having my hair dried with towel by him.

"Liza, now."
"Understood! I'll break through the column."

I apologize briefly to the soldiers on the side Liza is breaking through.
But, what should I do? The cavalries are chasing from behind. Are they angry for being pushed? They're angry right.

Mou! Please don't chase us with scary faces!

Karina

"Karina-dono, it seems that zombies have appeared on the front."
"My, they're in this forest so close to the city's wall, I'm surprised desuwa."
"Umu, the demon most likely is planning something."
『There is no need to worry, o small one. In front of us, they're no different to fallen leaves. Trampling them down is easy.』

My dialogs with Raka-san is replied by the head of wood giant--Ishizuchi-san. I've asked his name, but it's really, really long, it's rude and it looks like he'd hit me if I shorten it so I call him with that nickname, "Ishizuchi-san". This person's speak in very heavy low voice, it vibrates my stomach. I've never heard the language, but thanks to Raka-san, every word is heard in Shiga language to me. Raka-san is really great desuwa.

Raka-san and me are riding on the shoulder of Ishizuchi-san. It's almost like I've become a child, it's fun desuno. Sir Zotor is riding on another giant's shoulder. I've been told that the reason why they don't let two people ride on both shoulders is because it'd be hard to recover if they lost their balance.

This is the first time I see something like zombies, it's sickening things. Ishizuchi-san and

other wood giants eliminate them by trampling them as if they're ants.

Ara? When I look closer, aren't those armors of baron's army?

I wonder why, Ishizuchi-san who should be reliable suddenly looks hateful.

Ah, why do I raise my arm?

And then, toward Ishizuchi-san who should be my ally, from the side, my fist is--

Mia

"Coming ahead~"

Is there anything in front where Tama points? Says it. Eeh, you're lying, lying, a lot of people are running on the road as if clogging it? No, not that, they're escaping.

What should I do, what should be done? Swelling is no good, no good I say. If I use that magic, some people will get hurt right? They absolutely will.

Is there nothing? There should be something. That's right, I should ask for help from the forest, it's a small forest, but Lia has said that we're connected with forest, that's right, Raya has also said that.

Then, let's ask it immediately? No, Lia also said some other things.

『You can't ask for help from the forest until after you've become an adult and have learned forest magic alright? You'd get your magic power sucked dried by the gluttonous dryad you know?』

That's right, I'm sure she's said that. Ah, but, we're going to clash like this, Liza will surely go straight at them. That girl would do anything in order to meet Satou.
There's no time is there, there is no time.

"O forest, please!"

I ask as hard as possible. I don't want to have my magic power sucked dry, but I'll ask Satou to supply me with it like Nana. It's hard to throw away the idea to have magic supplied by mouth-to-mouth method like Arisa's said.

『I'll comply~, you can leave the charge for later, little bornean-chan.』

Childish voice is heard from the trees as if drowning others', a road between trees appears beside the crowd.

"Liza, forest."

With just that, Liza turns the course there. She's turned. She believes my words earnestly.

Now, let's go meet Satou.

Part 30 - The Girls' Battles (3)

Knight

"Oy oy, dividing the forest like that, what the heck are they."
"Captain."
"I know. Oy, you guys, follow the ladies before the forest closes."
""""Understood."""

My subordinates answer with good spirit to my words.
I've heard rumor before that says elves are able to freely make paths on forests. I thought that it was just some stupid drunken talks, but looked like it was true. This is just right, I'll make use of it to slip through that crowd.

Still, what's happening to baron Muno's territory? Looking at the appearance of those crowds, there's no mistake that they're people from Muno city.

Do hordes of monsters attack from the forest?
If it's that then they should have barricaded themselves inside the city, what actually happen anyway.

By the order of the duke, I've thought that this would be an easy job of just meeting his nephew couple, but feels like this has become an unthinkable military outing.

Tama

Nyu!

Path springs out of the forest~?

It looks like secret art of fairy, I'll ask Mia to teach me next time.

I'll be taking lots of prey freely~♪

When I stand on the horse to dance, "It's dangerous, sit down.", I've got scolded by Liza.

Could Liza see from her back~?

Huh?

Ahead, at the opposite side of the forest, I could see dark people behind the people who are running away on the highway?

Ah, an old woman fell.

A dark monkey-like thing bares its fang, bullying the old woman.

Don't bully the old woman.

I throw a stone from atop the horse.

Aah, the dark person's head disappeared.

Will master scold me?

Green blood are coming out of the dark person, looks like it's a monster.

Safe.

Liza

"Mia, to the highway."
"I understand."

Mia connects the path to the highway.
I want to quickly go to master's place, but I wouldn't want to show my face in front of master after abandoning people of the same race as master.
Master even gave mercy to thieves. He probably would not abandon innocent people.

I put magic power into the magic spear. After master reforges it, it feels like an extension of my arm. It feels as if my nerve is connected until the tip, I could wield it freely.

"With me holding this spear, I won't let you through."

A small fry which has passed through with its fast leg is already being dealt with by Tama. I'll leave that side to her.

The enemies are swarm of zombies.

"Mia, bow and arrow don't work on these things. Please support me with magic."
"Nn."

The magic spear slays the zombie which are swarming in group like it's mowing them. Normally, this is not how you should use spear, but thanks to the effect of magic blade that manifests when the magic spear is put with magic power as in accordance to what master has taught me, I could cut them as if they're dead trees.

If it was a normal spear, this careless handling would had broken it a long time ago.

"We're helping ya, scalekin nee-san."

Looks like the cavalries who have been following us from behind are going to participate in the battle.
It's fine as long as they don't get in the way....

Karina

My fist was stopped before it hit Ishizuchi-san.

"Raka-san, why are you stopping me?"
"Karina-dono, it's an attack from the demon's magic. Come back to your sense."

When the magic tools of Raka-san shine blue, the hatred inside me disappears as if being washed away.
Besides me, it seems that young wood giants and sir Zotor are affected by the magic.

The giants who are affected by the magic are pinned down by other giants.
Sir Zotor is violently raging while being held upside down by his feet.

I'm a bit disappointed.

"Ishizuchi-dono, hit to the front left."
『Acknowledged.』

Ishizuchi-san hits a tree nearby hard.

It was surprising.

Several dark people who have bat wings emerged from the place that should had been empty. Later when I ask Raka-san, it's not that the demons become invisible, but they disguise themselves as trees. It seems that it's called mimicry. They're like insects desuno.

"Kuhahaha, young lady, some unthinkable reinforcements you"

In the middle of the demon's talk, BAM, accompanying that sounds, the demon is sent flying to outside the forest.
Giants are short tempered. A female giant beside Ishizuchi-san hits and sends all the dark demons flying using an enormous club. It's as if the woodcutter beskyuu that comes out in the folklore.

Most of the dark demons have become dark rubbish after the attack, but one of them recovers and stands still in the air.

"That's the real body, Ishizuchi-dono, let's go!"
『Yeah』

However, the situation advances even before Ishizuchi-san moves.
Many little light that come out of nowhere are surrounding and bustling around the demon. It looks very beautiful, although my impression may be out of place.

"Ridiculous, it's impossible."
"Raka-san, what is going on?"
"That's a tactical level magic that belongs to advanced grade of magic art. Karina-dono, is there an exceptional magician working under the baron?"
"No, there's only one person who can use intermediate level magic, but there is no one who can use advanced level."

From the opposite side of the glittering light, a blue light dazzle for an instant. And then it immediately disappears to the horizon while drawing blue trace of light.

And then, the demon which should have been inside the glittering light is lost.

"Did it escape?"
"That's not it."

Raka-san answers with a voice that sounds as if it's squeezed out.

"Is it not?"
"The demon has been destroyed. No, it was destroyed from the attack of the holy sword just then. Ridiculous, unbelievable."

Holy sword?
Is the sword of that impostor really a holy sword after all?
No, that can't be possible. Or maybe, the real hero has rushed here?

"Maybe it was the real hero?"
"I do not know, but the problem is not about that, Karina-dono. The attack from the holy sword earlier wasn't normal. That was a forbidden technique of making magic tools ran wild by supplying it with excessive magic power in order to increase its attack power. It's unthinkable to make holy swords disposable. Just who in the world is it."

I am bothered by the thing about holy sword that Raka-san has said, but more than that, it's about the hero-sama. There are two holy swords in this country, but there's only one hero in the entire world. I think it's important to know if the one who has used the holy sword is the hero or not. I wonder what kind of person it is?

"Can't Raka-san see it?"
"It's too far so the power to see through can't reach it, but it seems to be a person wearing a silver helmet. Moreover, he has a golden sword, that's probably a holy sword."

That impostor didn't wear something like silver helmet. Furthermore, the sword that he had shown was letting off blue light that didn't have the feeling of mystic. It was vague at that time so I got deceived, but that sword can't be the twisting Gjallarhorn. If it's about holy sword, I could easily talk for three days straight you know?

"Raka-san, let's find out his true identity!"
"Wait, Karina-dono. First, we have to eliminate zombies that have overflowed the city's outer perimeter."
『Don't mind it, we have no more duty after the demon is destroyed. You can leave the disposal of the zombies to us and the knight.』

I take advantage of Ishizuchi-san's favor and let him take me down on the outer wall of the city.

However, was there a holy sword with golden blade?

Knight

"Oy, that scalekin's spear is the real deal, the heck is that?"
"It's amazing eh, it's used like an axe even though it's a spear. Moreover, looks like that light is from the magic blade."
"Uhhya~, just like the duke's imperial guard huh."
"Not just that, look at the horse of that little one. What is that? The little one is throwing stones that always hit its target while standing on the saddle, and the horse moves on its own to near the zombies and kick them."
"Isn't that normal for a war horse?"
"There's no way that fatty a war horse right? That's Gontsu species usually used for cart you know?"
"Oy, this isn't the time to be careless, something really dangerous has appeared from the interior."

My subordinates are properly defeating the zombies even though they're bantering, but we should brace ourselves since a dangerous enemy seems to have appeared.
If I remember right, that should be a hydra. Since it looks like a zombie, it'd be good if it could not use breath.

"Donovan, breath might come out, please use Air Shield if that happen."
"Understood, though I'm just saying that it'd be just a temporary measure against breath."
"I don't mind, better than nothing."

Mia

Mou!Just how many are they? Even though Liza and the cavalries should have defeated around 100 of them, they're still coming. It's really coming.

"■■■ ■ ■■ ■■■ Water Screen"

Dangerous. Really dangerous.
Behind the zombies, a snake with lots of neck was breathing fire. Surprising, I was really surprised.

But, but, I had wonderfully prevented it with water screen. Prevent you know. It'd break if I defended against it straight, so I had just warded it for a bit. I came up with it when I saw Pochi and Tama warded off Liza's spear. I had just put it into practical use you know?

Knight

The fire breath from hydra destroyed Donovan's Air Shield like it was crumpling paper, but a water screen casted from somewhere and formed in the interior repelled it.

"Oy, oy, yer' losing to that child over there."
"That one's an elf you know? She has lived several times ours even though she looks like that, she's a proper lady even though she's small."
"You don't mind even if you lose huh?"

Even while they were bantering, they kicked the pseudo-goblin zombies which was attacking from below.
Even that girl's magic won't be usable indefinitely. It gradually declines every time it receives the attack. There's no choice but to use Donovan's Air Hammer to secure the gap before the Hydra.

Part 31 - The Girls' Battles (4)

Liza

There's no end to this.

I probably have defeated dozens of zombies already. Even though I could defeat many with just a swing of my spear, their number is beyond expectation.

We've reached the place where I can see the city's gate after some struggling, but there are still more than 100 zombies infesting the area until the gate. It's easy to deal with goblins or thieves zombies, but it's a hard fight against bear or other monsters zombies that sometimes get mixed in.

On top of that, there's even such thing!

The multi-headed snakes that appears from behind the zombies, it's most likely not just big. It spits out fireball as if a dragon.
Thanks to Mia's magic, we're narrowly saved, but it's probably not something that could be defended for many times. I have no choice but to make the first move and take care of it quickly. For that to happen, I have to cut the distance to the multi-headed snake.

"Mia, the road!"

Mia should understand that. Mia uses the magic that she has used to push aside the soldiers earlier to push the zombies away and make a path among the zombies.

I load every ounce of the small magic power I have into the magic spear--

Lulu

I could hear noises from the direction of Muno city.

I wonder if Liza-san and the others are alright?

We've gathered 100 pebbles just a bit ago. No, it's nearly 200. Everyone seems to have been really eager for the risotto.
Right now I'm learning cuisines of this region from the housewives who have helped me. I will surprise master later.

"Was it okay to have offered so much food for us?"
"There is no problem."

When I was tasting the finished food, the tall and thin village chief came. Nana-san is supporting me. I'm really still not good with other guys beside master.

"Chief! It's terrible, refuges are rushing here from Muno city."
"What'd you say!"

"For now they've stopped in front of the village, but there are more than 100 people."

It seems that Arisa's worry has become real.
What should I do.

Knight

The scalekin nee-san begins her assault followed by red afterglow.
What great courage.

"Oy, let's widen the path the elf lady has opened."
"Righto."
"Vice-captain, go assist nee-san."

At any rate, that's the magic that we have got struck by, but I have no idea that you could use water magic like that. Some secret arts of elves huh.

"Donovan, there might be other hydra around, search for it with magic."
"Yes, captain."

Hopefully, it's just an unfounded fear.

Liza

I pierced the body of the multi-headed snake with an attack that used my whole body accompanied with roars.
I had the spiral spear attack that master had demonstrated to me once in mind while performing the attack, but as expected, I couldn't do it overnight.
Even so, looks like I've succeeded in neutralizing one of the multi-headed snake's head.

However, I cannot be discouraged.
My magic power has been depleted, my forged body body is the only thing remaining.

Pierce.

Parry.

When I see a chance, I deliver a heavy blow.

I was dubious since the attack from the snake was few, but before I knew it, a soldier wielding two sword was handling two of the snake's heads.

Some rotten goblins jumps out from under the flank of the multi-headed snake, but stones that flies from behind hit their heads, crushing it. Seems that Tama is also covering me firmly.

The two-swords soldier is quite skillful for a human.
Of course, he's still far away compared to master, but he wields those swords like he's dancing.

"Liza, here."

Mia who gets down from the horse passes me a bottle of potion. I still have no use for health recovery potion though?

"Magic power recovery."

I see.
I gulp down the bottle, and swallow the slightly sweet liquid. Is this how it feels when you recover your magic power. It feels a bit different from when you recover your health.

With my magic spear, I parry the multi-headed snake that has attacked after seeing the chance. One of my arm feels slightly hot sensation.

Looks like Mia casts balloon magic from my side. Green mist bursts out from below of the multi-headed snake's abdomen, toppling it down. It seemed that she made use of the multi-headed snake's blood that was on the ground.

Magic blade--wrapping the magic spear with red light.

While shouting with spirit, I drive the magic spear to the weak spot of the multi-headed snake that Mia has exposed, its stomach.

That big body wriggles for several times, and then it stops moving. This powerful enemy was not defeated with my power alone. Friends' power are great aren't they.

Mia

As expected of Liza nano. Liza is great right.

She could defeat such big multi-headed snake.
It's alright even without Satou. It's alright.

Yes, I was thinking such thing.

But reality is terrible. It's terrible!

Three similar snakes have appeared from the other side! What should we do? What should we really do. It was that hard just to beat one of them!

Knight

"Although vice-captain did great too, that nee-san defeated the hydra hey."
"Let's work hard until we reach the gate."
"But those swarms of zombies are continuing until the opposite side of the outer wall."
"Good grief, just where are they coming from."
"It can't be that No Life King has been revived right."

However, the room for our mundane chattering is over.

"Captain, three of them are coming from the interior."

I grimace at Donovan's report. Why does my bad hunch have to be proven right like this?
Three hydras come out from the interior.

"I, when this job is over, I will marry Pina-chan from the kitchen."

The fool is already escaping from reality.
There's no choice but to retreat here. Since Donovan is already tired of firing Air Hammer, we have to retreat in one stretch.

Liza

Those are impossible indeed.
Even though I could have reached to where master is in just a bit more....

I have force myself here as to not let Mia and Tama get injured.

I'm worried whether the human soldier earlier has escaped far enough, but we have no choice but to withdraw here. However, I wonder if we could get away safely with such enemies?

Let's preserve magic power for now.
The red light on the magic spear that I've stopped supplying with magic power grows dim. As if reflecting my weakness, I feel unpleasant.

Tama

I'm covering the last line of defense together with the horses.

It's another fire-spitting snake. This time there are three~?

If I'm not mistaken, it's said that if they're turned into kabayaki, it's delicious. What's kaba I wonder?

Haah, my stomach is hungry~.

The light from Liza's spear has disappeared, Mia is breathing roughly.

Pinch?

But, it's okay.

Toward the snakes that were going to spit fire to Liza and the others, lot, and lots of transparent arrows are descending.

See?

Whenever Tama and the others are in danger, master will always protect us nyan.

I want to eat meat quick~♪

Knight

"Am I dreaming?"
"Maybe it's support from baron's army."
"Stupid, one could fire at most three magic arrows right? Just how many dozens of people would be needed for that kind of number."

Moreover, the arrows aim toward the zombies that are going to disturb the spearworks of nee-san, and this happens not only once. I think that it's probably a companion of nee-san, but just spare me from misfire okay?

Good grief, I've had enough of absurdity today.

"Please look at that, giants are on the other side of the outer wall."

Heads of giants could be seen on the other side of the city's wall, it looks like they're not destroying the wall, but attacking something on the suburbs. I'm not sure about it, but they're most likely defeating the zombies on the other side.

I've heard that baron Muno is a carefree happy-go-lucky person, but is he employing even the giants? Impossible, story where giants helping humans only happen in heroic tales.

I'll say this again, I've had enough of absurdity already.

Part 32 - Mortal Combat with the Demon?!

Satou's here. For my work, I had put together a bit of disposable scripts once, but when I got accustomed to it, I could make one in less than 10 seconds.

New recruits were surprised when they see it, but they became able to do it themselves 1 year later. That is if they're still around after a year.

◇

"Where are those girls now?"
"They're right outside the city's wall. Looks like they're surrounded by zombies."
"Really? We have to help them!"
"Ah, we won't make it even if we run. I'll support them with Remote Arrow."

I tell Arisa so, get out to the balcony that faces the city and use the magic. I change into silver mask costume as a precaution if there are any witnesses.

"Uwah, transform? Transform skill?"
"It's just a skill for changing clothes fast."

I wonder if quick clothes-changing skill is rare?
While feeling slightly weirded out with Arisa's bizarre tension, I set up a short cane. I'm fine even without using one, but I'd probably look more like a magician with one.
I fire 3 successive shoots with 50 arrows for each shoot.



For some reason my head is tapped from behind.

"What's wrong Arisa."
"Magic isn't something that you can rapidly fire. When you're in front of people, keep around 10 seconds gap for each shoot."

I see, I've learned new things from Arisa-sensei.

For now, I have to get Liza and the others out of their predicaments. I'll let Liza and the others to finish off the lower 20s-leveled monster, so that they would gain experience, but their safeties come first.
I'm worried about the knight from duke Oyugock near them witnessing it, but they probably

wouldn't think that the magic is shot from here, so it's probably fine.

There doesn't seem to be anyone who hang around in the city. Although, it looks like there are thieves around, I mark them for now. I'll leave them alone even if they're in danger.

It seemed that the people who weren't rushing to the castle gate were taking refuges in their houses.

Zombies who get into the city are heading straight to the castle gate.

Looks like the baron and the others have somehow able to move into the castle's stronghold. Even though the fake hero and Ossan seem to be hurt, since they're alive, there's no problem.

◇

"Hey hey, what is that clothes? Cosplay? If you just had said it, I could had made cooler costumes than that unfashionable one! Something like cosplay of red comet, or black noble troupe, I want to make you wear many things~."

I'm fine as long as it hides my identity, but I don't want to become Arisa's plaything. She's saying something like, "Mask is romantic after all right.", but I ignore her.

"The forest is strange nano desu."

Pochi pulls the hem of my clothes.

That's right, I had put them off since I was worried with Liza's and the others' safeties, but the giants in the forest were in a pinch.
Fortunately, since giants who are affected with confusion are few, it doesn't seem to have ended up in friendly fire. As expected, It's probably easy for the high-leveled ones to resist the magic.

Now then, while I finish off foes which give Liza and the others hard time with Remote Arrow, I take out the wooden holy sword from the Item Box.

I'd like to try how usable this is against the demon in actual combat. In truth, I wanted to try it against the small fry demon like the Splitter, but since this weapon is too conspicuous with many people watching inside, I gave up.
Even if it doesn't work, I could just use another holy sword.

"You, don't tell me you're going to use that wooden sword?"
"That's right?"

I return Arisa's give-up face with a straight face.
If I say that I do have other trump card, she'd surely scold me with, "Fight with the strongest one from the beginning."
I've used the strongest holy sword when I was fighting Wagahai-kun, however, since the

enemy this time is not the type who fights straight, but one who plays dirty, I'm scared to think of the counter if I attack with something that's too strong.

◇

I ask Pochi to watch the urban areas and the castle gate, while I go to the balcony that faces the forest.
Arisa was also going to come along, but I stopped her.

"What?"
"There's someone who has see-through skill in the forest. I don't know how powerful the skill is, so I want to avoid situation where we can be seen."
"Are you fine yourself?"
"Yeah, I've hidden my name so it's fine."
"Wha"

After the incident with Zen I was checking the skill and took the opportunity to investigate the menu further, then I noticed that I was also able to alter my name in the exchange column.
I couldn't do it freely without limit though, just like with Title, I could only change it with names that I owned. In my case they're, [Satou], [Ichirou], [Ichirou Suzuki], [(Namae Nashi)], one among four of them. I've decided to use, [(Namae Nashi)], when I change into silver mask.

"Your menu is really a cheat huh."
"That so?"

Even though she's said that it's plain, it looks like the evaluation is getting better.
I think that you could do it with magic art anyway, and there are probably skills like, [Conceal Name], or [Alias] out there too.

Reflected on the radar, indicators that denote demons are suddenly rushing out of the forest quickly.

Don't tell me, surprise attack?

I immediately make Remote Arrow to stand by.

"W, what."
"It's the demons, they're jumping out of the forest."

Hearing that word, Arisa readies her cane from the middle of the room.

No, looks like that's not it. The demons are not jumping out, but blown away by someone. As a proof, the split bodies (Splitters) are annihilated the moment they've gotten out of the forest.

The demon's real body who's gotten blown out of the forest is floating in the air while

facing the forest.
I can't see it since it's too far, but it's probably floating with magic power. When I look hard at it, some skills become available. Might as well activate them.

>[Distant View Skill Acquired]
>[Bird's Eye Skill Acquired]
>[Seeing at a Distance Skill Acquired]

What's the difference between Distant View and Seeing at a Distance skills? Later when I ask Arisa, it seems that distant view lets you see far away things while they're still looking small, and Seeing at a Distance lets far away things look to be closer. Looks like the former narrows your view, while the latter let you see details in far away things.

"Uh, my magic could had reached it if it was closer."

I guess it's about 2 kilometers away.

"Won't it reach if you you use Over Boost?"
"Nope, nope, it would reach, but if it's that far, the power would be too thinned out."

A little idea hit me, I take out a bolt and a crossbow from the Item Box. About the crossbow, I tried dissembling it once to understand how it worked--since it was boring to reassemble it back just like that--I remodeled it. Liza wasn't able to pull the bowstring since I went too far with the remodeling.

"Wait, if you're using normal arrow, even if it reach it won't deal significant damage you know?"
"Is it like that?"

I cut the bolt in half using the Troll Slayer dagger. I feel that Arisa would scold me if I casually use a holy sword for that, so I use this one instead.

I engrave the same pattern as holy sword on the remaining half of the bolt and pour the blue liquid that I've used to make the wooden holy sword. Since I've stored it in the Storage, it's still fresh.

After I've finished pouring the blue liquid, I put it on the magic bestowing stand and complete the process. It may be the result of me doing it once that I've done this far without even taking 30 seconds.

"You, you're making it as if you have production skill related cheat huh."

I put glue on the bolt and attach a thin piece of metal on it.

Alright, holy bolt is complete.
The cost is about 20% of holy sword. This might be more usable than that.

I put magic power into the Holy Bolt.

Since Arisa has had put 100 MP into the the holy sword just fine, first I'll put around 50 MP.

It's fine.
Continuing on, 100 MP.

The demon seemingly has noticed the light leaking from the window, it turns toward here.
In order to restrain it, I make the standing-by Remote Arrow to encircle it.

"Demons aren't something you can defeat with beginner class magic."
"It's just for restraint."

Oh?

Even though I've said that it's for restraint to Arisa, the demon's health is gradually decreasing from the remote arrows that hit it. Looks like it doesn't have instantaneous recovery like No-Life King. It might be unexpectedly beatable with rapid firing of Remote Arrow.

When I put 200 MP into the Holy Bolt, it begins to shake. It's the same pattern like with Liza's spear. It would probably explode if I put more.

Now then, I wonder how much damage will it incur?

Since the restraining Remote Arrows are encircling the demon like a cocoon, the demon is already doing everything it could just to avoid the magic arrows.

I've decided on the aim, and shoot the holy bolt.



And then, several hundred meters away after the shooting, the holy bolt causes a small explosion--

"Aah."
"I guess it's impossible for a such hastily-made thing."

From there, it rapidly accelerates and flies.

Drawing blue tracks of light, it sucks up the demon--

"Huh?"

--It flies away beyond the empty sky while leaving several circles that looks like black mist.

It was too anticlimactic of an end, but since the log displayed, [Short Horn Demon is Defeated!], I did have properly defeated it.

I watch the black mist disappear while tapping the golden wooden holy sword that doesn't get its turn.

"Hey, what about the demon? Is it coming here?"

From Arisa's point of view, it only looked like a small explosion.

"I've beat it."

I clown around for a bit, but it doesn't fit my character. Arisa is befuddled. Good, it was really good that I didn't attach, "Tehee."

"Holy weapons really work well against demons huh."

I deceive her with a straight face.

"Wha!? This cheat guy~~ what about my turn~."

Arisa flops down on the carpet exhausted, but I won't say to her that, being a reincarnated person with unique skill that she is, we're the same kind.

The giants are dropping off a person who looks to be the young lady on top of the passage of the city wall. I can't see the magic tool with the see-through skill called Raka-san or something. It probably could either becomes small or transparent.

I'm getting a hunch that this will be bothersome. I lead Arisa and the other away from this place quickly.

Part 33 - End of Turmoil

Satou's here. There's a saying that, "There is no younger brother who surpasses his older brother.", but a "Younger sister who surpasses her older sister." does exist you know.

◇

Well, now that the demon has been dealt with, let's meet up with Liza and the others.
Lulu and Nana are remaining in the village, so they're probably fine. Both of their HP haven't decreased, and also Nana's MP and Lulu's stamina are at no-problem level.

"Now then, Arisa, Pochi, let's get out of here."
"Yes, nano desu."
"Okay."

What's wrong Arisa, you look awfully tired.

"Are you tired?"
"Yeah, I really am."
"I'll piggyback you nodesu~."

It looks like she's not pleased with the instant-kill of the demon with the holy bolt earlier. I should have not taken Arisa's turn to shine after all.
Since Pochi seems to want to carry Arisa on her back, I leave it to her. When Pochi is running down the the stairs, Arisa shouts, "N, No, I'd rather master to carry me instead~". Looks like she's unexpectedly energetic.
Before I knew it, she had started to call me, "Master" again, instead of "you". Since I don't particularly care, I let her call me whatever she likes, but that Arisa obstinately calls me "Master" only when she's exhausted.

I lift off the silver mask costume that I've forgotten to.
Of course, I also clean-up the wooden holy sword and the remains of holy-bolt creation without leaving any trace.

>[Evidence Destruction Skill Acquired]

It's a skill reeks of crime, but after I activate it, I perfectly clean-up the traces once again.

I feel like I could do perfect crimes now.

◇

When I'm joining with Pochi and Arisa who are in front of the deserted mansion, I notice that the second daughter of the baron is coming here quickly.

Even though the destruction of evidences takes time, she has just been at the wall, she's really fast. She likely have used magic.

The lady appears from behind the tall hedges.

Demonic.

"You people there, where are hero-sama desuno?"
"Hero-sama had gone with baron-sama to the castle's stronghold."
"It's not that imitation. I'm talking about hero-sama with the golden sword desuwa."

Demonic.

"The hero-sama I know is only that one. I don't think there's anyone else inside the mansion?"
"Karina-dono, this girl seems to have said the truth. Let us go upstairs."
"Where's that voice coming from nodesu? I can't see the jii-chan nodesu."
"Don't tell me, it's an intelligence item?"

Demonic.

Yes, those are somethings that only exist in 2 dimension (Fiction).

"I understand, young ladies, thank you for the information desuwa."

Demonic breasts (Manyuu)--an existence that has surpassed explosive breasts (Bakunyuu)--Supported by silver locket-shaped ornament, they're hanging, the girl with proportion that looks like a joke runs up the stairs.

"What happen, you've hardened like a stone since awhile ago."

Thanks to Poker Face skill, my glances weren't exposed.
It was too kyonyuu, I had stopped thinking. Even in my wildest dream, I didn't think that there was an existence that surpassed that girl's big sister.

It'd be hard to oppose if such human approaches you.
In a sense, she's more dangerous than the demon.

"I'm sorry, I was surprised to see an Intelligence Item for the first time."
"You're lying. You were probably ●REC-ing that manga-like kyonyuu right?"

Looks like Arisa could see through my lame excuse.
Oh right, rather than that.

"Arisa, can you create figure of my cosplay earlier with your magic?"
"I could do it if it's just an image seen from eyes."

I see, an image huh.

"Then, create the illusion on the window of the mansion's top floor and have him jump around like a flea toward the castle wall, to the urban area."
"Like that, it'd be out of the range of my magic--Is it really necessary?"

"You don't want the kyonyuu beauty from earlier to follow us along right?"

Her appearance is totally in my strike zone, but I feel like the personality is the type I'm not good with.

"Okay. I want to avoid that with all my power."

Violet magic circle appears on Arisa's surrounding. It's Arisa's unique skill, [Over Boost].
I've made sure that there's no one in the vicinity already, even though there's no one in sight on around 2 meters away from the hedge, it may be a bit careless of her to use it outside in the middle of the day.

The illusion of silver mask appears on the mansion's balcony, and casually jumps out from the window. While carrying the golden sword on its shoulder, it's jumping around like pyon-pyon, in straight posture, and then disappears in the city.
The movements were a bit disgusting, but it seemed that the people in the stronghold had properly noticed it, it was a good performance.

Slightly after the illusion goes to the city, the lady shows her face on the balcony.
I've thought that she would come out a bit faster, but the inertia of those breasts are probably really great indoor making her unable to run with all her might. I've hoped that she would witness it when the illusion is out of the see-through skill range, but since there are other witnesses around, there's probably no problem.

Arisa who is exhausted after using Over Boost tries to coerce me to drink her stamina potion mouth-to-mouth, but I pinch her nose and thrust the potion bottle on her mouth.

◇

Now then, before I meet up with Liza, there's one final work that I have to do.

With Remote Arrows, I crush the zombies who are coming out of the passage that the companions of fake hero have used and litter the road with corpses. And of course I also close the entrance near the castle by bending the iron bars near it and tie them to it.

Even though the fake hero's companions are badly hurt, it seems that there's no one who dies, they're moving toward the territory's border using the side road.

For some reason, knight Eral--It's the guy who's tried to stab Hayuna-san--is also moving behind them. When did that guy escape. His health and stamina are in critical condition too, but this type of guy is usually hard to die, so he probably would live.

Looks like the giants and knight called Zotor are blockading the front gate. Liza and the others are taking care of the zombies inside the city while heading toward the castle gate.
Since the zombies who have invaded the city are consisted of thieves and goblins, they're weak on the whole. I've not fired any support shoot since awhile ago since the opponents are too weak for Liza and the others.

◇

There aren't only soldiers on the top of the castle gate, but also several servant-like people, they are shouting something to the people outside.

Liza and the others are going to arrive soon. The three's levels have been raised. As expected, they would after that many battles. Pochi has become the lowest leveled one among the beastkin girls. Next time, I guess I'll take Pochi to a monster hunting date at midnight.

I lead Arisa and Pochi to climb up the tower beside the castle gate. There's a door that goes toward the castle gate halfway through the tower.
I wonder what is this smell spreading inside the tower. It really stinks. Pochi put both her hands on her nose as if it's really painful. It's quite a cute gesture.

"Ugeh, what's this kendo's guard-like smell."
"Stinknodesu."

We get out of the dark tower to the top of castle gate. The light is dazzling.

"Oh! she's defeated the last one."
"Yer' amazing, demi-human knight-san."
"Now, people who've bet on the scalekin knight-san for defeating the last one! Receive your share."

Air of delight is dominating the top of the castle gate.
It seems that Liza has just defeated the last zombie. They're about 300 meters away from the castle gate.

"Liza! Tama! Mia!"

I call the three of them while waving my hand.
Liza who noticed me lead the other two to come here while riding the horses. About 10 Oyugock knights are following them from behind.
What's with the subordinates-like movement.

"Are they subordinates of magician-sama?"

The one who ask is wearing soldier-like clothing, but it's actually one of the maid that I've met on the mansion. Since she had rolled up her hair and wears a helm, I did not noticed.
When I affirm it, she says, "I'll make arrangement immediately", and conveys something to an important-looking man. It seems that he's one of the few survivors of the regular soldiers.

With his instruction, one of the door for horse riders is opened, and Liza and the others go inside the castle.

"Satou."

Someone jumps from the unsaddled horse, it's Mia. I catch her and holds her sideway. She's as light as ever.

"Tama."
"Pochi."

Beside us, Pochi and Tama firmly hug each other. Since the two of them were always together, they might had been lonely.

However, Liza is still cautious even after she gets inside the castle. She's moving her line of sight vigilantly.

"Thank you for your hard work too Liza, there's no enemy inside the caslte, it's alright."

After I assert so, she finally removes her vigilance, and dismounts.
However, her tension is still high. She's probably tense since this is inside the baron's castle.

"You don't have to worry, baron-sama and his peers are open-hearted good people. Pochi was loved too."
"I've received baked sweets nodesu~."

Pochi takes out baked sweets from her pocket and shares it to Tama and Mia. Come to think of it, she was fed on something when she was sitting on the daughter's lap.

"Master, it is most reassuring that you're safe."
"Un, I'm glad that Liza is safe too."

Since there's a small wound on Liza's arm, I heal it with the magic that I've just learned today. Fumu, it uses 10 MP for such small wound huh, looks like potions are more efficient.

Liza is apologizing for leaving her position and coming to the city that has resulted in exposing Tama and Mia to dangers.
It seemed that her action was because she was anxious that I would be imprisoned by the noble. Looks like she's worried about me, with different reason than Arisa.

I'm thankful for the worry, but tonight, I will tell Liza that it's just an imaginary fear.

Part 34 - End of Turmoil (2)

Satou's here. In my childhood, the word "fiancee" was present in many stories. It has become obsolete before I know it, but I've realized that it's not actually that fun when it befalls me, Satou.

◇

"You're Nee-san's master huh?"
"It's a pleasure to meet you. I'm Satou, a merchant."

The young knight with three scars on his face talked to me. He's the captain of the 17th knight squadron of the dukedom that have followed Liza. Even though they're knight of the dukedom, the captain doesn't hide his social status, the vice-captain introduces themselves. Both of them are commoners. Maybe because of that, they feel more like mercenaries than knights. I've thought that a knight would be a ranked noble, but it doesn't appear to be so.

The vice-captain beside him is wearing helmet, so his face can't be seen, but his tribe is the rare panther-headed clan. Of course, I'm not going to deliberately touch upon it.

"Hoo, she wasn't the guard of a noble but a merchant huh. At any rate, you've hired someone really capable, she can even use magic blade. You're probably a heir to a very large merchant family right."
"No, far from being large, I'm a merchant who doesn't even have a store on his own. This time we've just had chance to meet with baron-sama."
"Sorry, the captain is the type who speaks first before thinking."

The vice-captain covered the last part of the captain's talk, but I heard it. The vice-captain covered for the captain, but I think it wasn't something to hide at all.

While we were chatting around, the maid earlier came back and guided us toward the stronghold.

◇

"Aah! How dare you deceive me back then!"

When we were dismounting the horses inside the stronghold, a high-pitched voice resounded. It's the second daughter of the baron (Karina) from earlier.

"She comes out, that oppai lady."
"That is enemy."

Arisa and Mia spoke abusively in low voice. Since there's something like lese majeste, do speak in quietly okay?

Swoosh, along with the sound of wind tearing the empty air, the lady's fist has penetrated

through the place where my face has just been.
Huh~? Suddenly battling huh. Is there any reason for me to get twisted in like this?

I try to hear her reason while avoiding.

"Why"

I avoid a jab.

"Am I"

I turn over her hook.

"Being attacked?"

I handled the barrage of attacks from the lady who moved as if she was a fighting game character.
I couldn't help but always got my awareness robbed by the shaking mountains that shook whenever she moved, but I tried to look desperate in avoiding her as much as possible. However, isn't it painful when those things move that much?

I caught a sight of Liza and Pochi who are going to jump on her. Looks like the other three had controlled themselves from jumping in. I wave my hand when my eyes meet theirs.

"What's with that composure desuno."

After a slight lag, she tries to sweep my leg and I jump to avoid it.
Oops, we were in the middle of battle.

"Impudent desuwa."
"I'm just good at avoiding."

Come to think of it, since I've only been looking at her breasts, I don't realize it before, she's not wearing dress but some kind of horse-riding pants. Her hair has a lot of braids too, if it's only by look, she's like an elegant young lady from horse-riding club who's enjoying her holiday.

"Mou, how capricious! Fight fairly if you're a hero."
"The hero-sama is over there. He's standing next to Soruna-sama right?"

I talk while avoiding her attacks, this could make me bite my tongue.
Her older sister, lady Soruna is coming here together with the fake hero. Rather than looking surprised with your hands on your mouth, I'd like you to stop this wild horse instead.

"It's not that! You were the one who annihilated the demon right!"

That was dangerous, if I didn't have poker face skill, it would have appeared on my face.
Even if she had witnessed the demon's destruction, the distance between us was several kilometers, even though the magic organism (Raka) had see-through skill, I couldn't believe

that he could see me.
However, based on their conversation with Arisa earlier, it might have way to judge truth from lie. I have to be careful as to not have my wit overtaken.

"I remember that it's said that no normal human could defeat a high-ranking demon though?"
"That's right desuwa, that's why you're hero-sama. If that's not true, then say it."

I confirm the title on my status. Yup, I've taken off the title of hero. Of course, the title column on the exchange menu is alright too. Right now, I'm not a hero.

"I am not."

After receiving my answer, the tiara on lady Karina's forehead blinks. So the silver ornaments she's wearing like that tiara are the true form of the magic organism (Raka) huh. They look like reinforced arms.

"Raka-san?"
"Truth."
"...No way."

The lady is shocked after hearing the voice from the tiara.

"There is no mistake Karina-dono, he is not the hero."
"Then, just where has that true hero with golden sword gone to!"

Since she's throwing a tantrum, I'm moving away.
Looks like she's not so well educated. Considering it's that baron, she probably has been brought up indulgently.

"Karina, the silver masked person with golden sword appeared from the mansion's top floor and disappeared in the direction of the city you know?"
"Is that true, onee-sama?"
"It's true Karina-sama, I've seen it too."
"I didn't ask you."

She frankly believes the words of her older sister, lady Soruna. She's cold against the fake hero. Live strong.
It doesn't seem like lady Karina is going to go after it to the city.
She apologizes for attacking me by mistake, even though it's partly because the older sister has reprimanded her. Her gesture is so ladylike to the point that I'm thinking if the battle-junkie manner earlier is an illusion.

Since I've enjoyed the wonderful shaking in close proximity, and the peanut gallery around us should have been too, I accept the apology without complaining.

◇

We're being guided to the audience hall inside the stronghold by lady Soruna. Somehow, lady Karina who has sulky looks on her face is also following us. Of course, the duke's knight captain also follows.
It's fine that they do but--

"Even sir Zotol wasn't able to defend half of my attack, I couldn't believe that he could even avoid my surprise attack."
"However, he's not a hero, no mistake 'bout it."
"But, those moves didn't look like a beginner."
"Those moves were certainly amazing. I'd like to be taught at least once."
"Someone like you won't even last a match. Stay out of it."
"Karina!"
"But, Soruna ane-sama."

Not only was the the lady complaining by while muttering, even the hero asked me to teach him. I'll talk to the fake hero, so the lady won't bother me.

"I'm only good at avoiding. By the way hero-sama, what happen to that face?"
"Ha ha, please stop calling me hero. I was just set up and used by the demon to be one, I wasn't up to the caliber. The bruise on my face is the proof. There were people hired by the consul, no the demon, mixed in with the people who got inside the castle gate. I was hit when I protected baron-sama."
"I see, it's a honorable injury is it."
"That's right, the reason why I wanted to be a hero was to protect someone. The demon made use of that feeling, but my desire to protect hadn't changed."

Fake hero, what the heck are you talking about?

"I'm going to be the knight of Soruna-sama."
"Ufufufu, that's wonderful desuwa. Since the family's peerage will be inherited by my little brother, I could marry anytime you know?"
"Soruna-sama, I will be your knight without fail!"

Since the two have begun to get excited without minding the place, we leave them alone. A maid steps forward as a substitute for the guide.

◇

In the audience hall, there are a woman of around thirty lying on a simple bed and also baron-san, hayuna-san and her family. The woman is Nina Rottol, a viscount. Her cheeks have been drained, but the light of will on her eyes are strong. From the story before, she should have been locked in the gaol for more than a year, she's probably quite a resilient person at heart.
I don't know the reason why the demon didn't kill her, but it was probably nothing decent.

"I'm sorry for this look. I'm the new consul, Nina."

Her voice is powerful and husky.

The duke knight captain and me return the greeting.

"It looked like you were able to see through the true form of the demon."
"Yes, I had got various informations from my fellow merchants, and then I confirmed it with fathoming crystal."

Today, the deception skill is having its field day too.
Raka which can see-through lies is with Karina who's having reunion with the baron, so it's not paying attention here.

"Furthermore, on top of eradicating that demon, you've also exterminated the monsters which have gotten inside the city right."
"It was my companions who did that. Moreover, according to lady Karina's story, the demon's real body was annihilated by a mysterious silver mask."
"Companion? Ah, achievements of your slaves belong to your achievements you know."

What kind of reasoning is that.
In addition, captain-san also praises Liza and the others.

"Nina-dono, his companions also did another deeds. They protected the people who were running away from flocks of demon on the highway outside the city, and no one was hurt. We were also assisting them, but without their leadership, we would have not been able to prevent some deaths."

Since that's the first time I've heard it, I listen to his story carefully.

The three have did wonderfully.

Even baron-san who starts to listen to the story midway lets out exaggerated surprise. It feels like listening to a bard rather than a knight captain.
After the captain has finished telling the success of Liza and the others, Nina-san is whispering something to baron-san. Baron is nodding up and down. Somehow, Nina-san looks to be the superior here.

"Magician Satou-dono, do you have someone whom you serve?"
"No, there is none."

I inadvertently answered frankly, but I had a bad feeling from this flow.

"Then, would you like to serve this territory's baron? You'd be only given honorary knight title at first, but there's no one like that among generation of Muno-sama's vassal. He's surely a baron for now, but he's a respectable lord. It has been determined that he would be promoted to be an earl before he gets a grandchild. Depending on your work, you could advance your rank as you please you know?"
"I'm really sorry but--"

Of course, I refuse Nina-san's offer. My purpose is to go on a sightseeing, not becoming a noble and succeed in life. Afterwards, Nina-san continues to aggressively solicit me for

about half an hour.

While evading her, the story about the annihilation of baron's army and the clean-up of the demon outside the city by the giants get mixed in.

"Apparently, you really helped this baron's territory which had been in the brink of ruin to survive. It might be better if you marry with baron-sama's daughter and join the family."
"You're overestimating me."

The second daughter over there comes out with an explosive statement.

"Then it's fine for him to be my fiancee. Then his achievements would become baron's family achievements right?"

This woman! She absolutely spoke that only to harass me.

"How about it? Are you going to be the fiancee of a beauty or a honorary knight, you could also take both you know?"
"Umu, it might be fine to leave Karina to Satou-dono."

Even baron-san is agreeing while nodding. I have a feeling that if I'm to marry lady Karina, he thinks that Pochi and Tama would follow along too.
I like her looks, but judging from her action and speech, I don't think that we'd lead a satisfactory life.

"N, no, something like fiancee."
"No."

After hearing the problematic remark of lady Karina, Arisa and Mia who had been grinning and looking as if spectators intruded.
Liza has been spreading intimidating aura on her surrounding behind me since awhile ago.
I don't know since when, but Pochi and Tama are being fed by the maids with baked sweets on the corner of the room.

In the end I lose to their forceful push, and take the route of becoming a honorary knight. I will have no duty but in return, I won't get salary or pension.
Even though I would become a noble, even if it's of the lowest rank, Arisa doesn't assist me as if agreeing with it. Looks like her stance is that of 'as long as he doesn't become lady Karina's fiancee'.

When Liza, Pochi and the others are offered to become the baron's vassal for their achievements, we refuse it but in exchange we ask for the like of Totona and the others and also serfs who have ran away to be promoted to become commoners. We also get the permission for the development of the reclaimed lands to be handed to their villages. Of course, it was Arisa who was negotiating.

In the end, we had to settle various affairs, and we could only leave the baron's territory after two weeks.

Intermission: Lulu

I had always been an unwanted child since I was young.

My mother worked as a maid in the castle, so since childhood, I was taken care by my aunt who lived in the castle town. I don't have a father. When I was younger, I heard something about my father, but it was left aside.

"You're really ugly. Go draw water so I don't have to see that face."

It seemed that my aunt hated my face, I was often told to do works outside the house.
My aunt and her husband had two boys and one girl of the same age as me. They're Jido, Bado and Kuku.

Jido disturbed me by kicking me when I was just about to pull the water from the well.
Bado tripped my feet when I was carrying the bucket.

I was usually cautious toward them, but I didn't see their figures today, it was a failure.
Since the water splashed onto soil, I had become full of mud.

"Yay, muddy Lulu."
"Hehen, mud make-up looks better than your normal face y'know~"

I wept as I was more vexed that I couldn't deny them more than getting myself muddied. It was a fact that people were gentler to me when I was covered with mud and my face couldn't be seen than when I was just simply soaked.

When I was washing my body near the well, Kuku came. She was with her usual sarcastic friends.

"Ara? What a waste of your special make-up."
"Right right, wouldn't it better if she wear mask anyway?"
"That's good! Kuku, you're a genius!"

The girls weren't using violence like Jido and Bado, but their words hurt me all the same. At a time like this, I wonder how would Arisa retaliate? If it was Tama-chan, she would likely throw mud balls toward those girls for their own make-up.

It was generally like these during my childhood.

◇

When I was 9 years old, my mother took me to the castle together with her. I was to be the princess's playmate. It seemed that the fourth queen's daughter was quite a sickly person. Moreover, she was really hard to please, noble daughters couldn't keep her company for more than three days, so they turned to me.

Normally, for a commoner like me to meet a princess, I would have to take etiquette lesson for about a year first, but it seemed they gave up in 2-3 days, so the lesson was abbreviated.

"It's Lili's daughter this time? Mou, I've said many times that I don't need playmates, if they insist, then bring me a scholar or a bureaucrat instead."

What I heard from the other side of the door was a child voice with tired and proud adult words that didn't suit it. I'm not welcomed here either after all.
The princess that I met for the first time was a very beautiful girl with mysterious violet hair and pupils. Furthermore, her eyes were really calm like an adult.
Pushed by my mother, I awkwardly introduced myself, the princess glanced at me and then briskly stepped toward me and push up my bang. I always covered my ugly face with a bang so it wouldn't be seen.
I prepared myself for the abuse that the princess would throw at me. But the abuse was different from what I expected.

"Cih, this riajuu face, winners have it all since they're born."
"Arisa-sama, even though this girl can't be said to have superior look, she's a good girl that's calm at her age. Please don't hate her."

Riajuu face? I've never heard those words.
Arisa-sama leaned her neck to the side after hearing my mother's word and murmured, "Poor look?" That's the kindness of a mother. She couldn't really say that her own daughter was ugly.

"What are you saying? Lili. If you tell me that this bishoujo face is poor, that'd mean this country doesn't have any beauties you know?"

At this time, I had thought that Arisa's words were an indirect sarcasms, but she told me later that she was serious.
Thus, I became the playmate of the princess.

◇

The princess that I served was a slightly strange person.
She ordered the servants to cultivate a field on the castle's garden, and she went inside the library and treasure vault in the castle to read many difficult books. Even though she made her unusual clothes herself, she couldn't do embroidery or knitting, she had many imbalances like that. Moreover, she was also not good with social dancing and poem reciting.

"Did you look at the new playmate of the taboo princess?"
"I saw I saw, what's with that ugly girl."
"Hey, they'll scold you if you say that."

I heard such backbiting from the the maid's room. It seemed that taboo princess was about Arisa. Looked like, those violet hair and pupils were considered to be bad omen.
I didn't tell about it to anyone, but the women were gone in the next day. The princess said, "Fufun, it's impossible for malicious gossip to skip my sharp ears." It seemed there was a

magic tool to hear far sounds, it was called voice pipe.

At the following day, princess Arisa told me a children story called "The Ugly Duckling".
Princess Arisa had told me many stories, but I liked this story the most
I wasn't as naive as to think that I would become like the swan in reality, but I thought I was allowed to dream a little.

◇

Hectic days continued after that.
What surprised me most was the fact that I was the older sister of princess Arisa from different mother. It seemed she heard it with that tool called voice pipe from the other maids' talks. It should had been a secret, but princess Arisa already knew about it.

"With this, there are 12 siblings. There are probably more if I look in the castle town. I'd hate a country without entertainment. That's right Lulu."
"Yes, what is it Arisa-sama."
"I'm banning the 'Sama'."
"Yes?"
"Like, I, said, when it's only the two of us, don't use it. Since we're sister, I'm banning the honorific."

The face of pri--no, Arisa which had turned away looked red.
At this day, we became sisters, no, the best of friends.

◇

Arisa wanted to do agricultural reform to make this country prosperous.
However, I was worried. The minister's son was supporting Arisa's agricultural reform, but from the gossip of the maids, it looked like he wasn't a decent human being.

"It's fine, men aren't trustworthy in the first place, but that kind profit-seeking type is surprisingly usable. Above all, this country only sees women as tools for giving birth. If I don't have a puppet like that then I wouldn't be able to meddle in the politics."

However, after this day, the cogwheels of our plan began to go out of order little by little.

The mountain died, monsters came out of the fertilizers, and the fields' harvests dropped sharply.
But, I personally was more worried about Arisa than the country. Even though she was called, "The Wise Salvation Princess" just the other day, now as if flipping hand, they called her, "Country Destroying Witch", or "Mad Princess".
Then the king finally confined her inside one of the spire in the castle. It seemed that our country had been occupied by another country, although I didn't know the detail since I was only looking after Arisa while being confined with her.

The kings and his companions were executed, and we became slaves.

Arisa was looking like a doll with her lifeless eye and lethargic condition. She's not like the usual stout-hearted Arisa, but she's still a 10 years old girl. It is not unreasonable.

The strength in Arisa eyes came back after a year, when we were moved to the royal villa from the prison, it came back a bit. In the evening with full moon, the royal capital sank into flame. The two of us ran away to the mountain. We were surviving while being frightened by the wolves sounds, endured starvations by eating nuts, and drank water collected with leaves.
When we ran out of strength on the highway among the mountains, we got caught by a passing slave trader. If we had not got caught at that time, we would probably die of starvation or fall victim to the wolves' fangs.

◇

"Guhehehehe~."

I felt cold shivers on my spine when I heard creepy voices from Arisa.
Aah! It seemed that the stout Arisa had finally reached her limit.

Even though I'm clumsy and good-for-nothing, an older sister is still an older sister.
I don't know what kind of person our master would be like, but I would protect Arisa until the end.

Even though I had such grim determination--

That Arisa, she was just laughing after finding her favorite type of young man! Mou, that Arisa, mou!

It was several days later that the young man became our master.

My first impression on that person is, "He looks like me."
He's not ugly like me, but his features are similar. His lines are slender, his colors are also not white, but black like me.
But, I don't think that he's as pretty as Arisa make him up to be. I wonder what does Arisa like from him?

◇

"It's quite tough."
"What is?"

I was surprised when I heard Arisa's story. That Arisa! She was crawling inside master's bed in nude herself to get his favor. She's too bold!

But, master didn't seem to touch Arisa. Master should be only 2-3 years apart from Arisa, it was strange that he didn't lay his hands on her when someone as beautiful as Arisa approached.

I wonder if master likes men?

◇

Today, I talked a lot about Arisa with master.
I noticed that I was talking too much in the middle, but I couldn't restrain myself as I didn't feel tense like I would with other men.
But, master listened me to the end without showing unpleasant face even once.

Furthermore!
Furthermore desu!

He didn't look disgusted from seeing my face.
It might be the first time this happened beside with Arisa.

It might only be my misunderstanding, but I felt like he was looking at me gently full of affection. Even if it was misunderstanding, it is fine.

Since the only one who could cook was Liza, I offered myself to help her. I also had things I could do. I would work hard to become something that was needed, not only as a freebie from Arisa.

Ehehehe~.
I got master to praise me, "Tea made by Lulu is delicious."
This might possibly the first time I had been praised by a person.

◇

"Yes, listen to the sound well."

Impossible. It's impossible, master!
Y, you can't whisper so close to my ears.

Aah! I feel too happy, I would likely get a nosebleed. As a girl, I cannot live if that situation happen. I'll endure with spirit.

But, it was not a whisper of affection. I earnestly asked the secret of the really delicious steak that master had made yesterday.

But it was not the time to listen to the oil at all when I was being embraced from behind with our hands stuck together holding the frying pan.

Even so, I still managed to grill one somehow.
When I sampled the meat, even though it was absolutely no match against the one that master grilled, it was many times tastier than the one I made yesterday!

As a proof that I was not mistaken, the plate became empty in a blink of an eye.

◇

It was exposed to Arisa.
I wonder how did she knew that I was attracted to master. It's mysterious.

But, master is very popular.
Not only to Arisa, but to Pochi-chan and the others too.

Furthermore, this time, even the the elf princess!

"I, I will also work hard to gain your favor."
"Yes, yes, you're cute Lulu. However let's wait the favor until you refine yourself as a woman in 5 years okay."

Cute he said!
Just now, he said that I was cute right?!

Ah, I can die of happiness.
To think that the day I got called that so naturally would come, it was such an absurd thought even in a dream or a delusion.

Even though the rivals increased, we had got to share bed together, we even did "A~n" like lovers, it was full of happiness.

Becoming master's wife or mistress are too unrealistic of a dream, but if some kind of mistakes happen, I would bear master's baby.

When I talk about it to Arisa--

"It's alright Lulu! When I become the legal wife, I will absolutely make Lulu the second!"

Arisa is very reliable.
But, I can't keep relying on Arisa.

I can't match with my face no matter what, but I work hard every day to make my figure suit master's liking. I'm still doing [Bust-up Practice] that Arisa and Mia have given up in three days.

And also my cooking! I will improve my cooking to be equal for standing next to master.

And then, he would say "Lulu, you're cute." once again!
It's an audacious ambition, but I will absolutely make it comes true.

Intermission: Muno's Past

This is a saloon on the corner of the royal palace. It's dim even in midday due to the numerous thick curtains covering the light from outside, magic tools illuminate from below. Curtains are hanging from the roof and decorative plants are set to divide sofa sets as if to obstruct the views.

For that reason, the identity of the people in this place aren't known--That's how it is.

Furthermore, the gaps between each sofas are large, magic tools for changing voices are used and they talk in whisper to the point that the other person sitting on the next seat can barely hear it.

This is the place where gossips from all over Shiga kingdom are gathered.

It's an important place for the nobles to not only talk about scandals, but also to exchange informations revolving national defense that have been transmitted using magic.

◇

"Have you heard about it?"

One gentlemen sits down while greeting someone in secret.
Publicly, the person shouldn't be known, but everyone knows who's the one who can sit on that sofa set. They only pretend to not know.

"Is it about marquis Muno?"
"Oh, you're quick."
"Right now, everyone is talking about that story. Like how undeads are attacking Muno city."
"Half a day after the initial report from the royal palace emergency room, there's no more additional information, it's worrying."
"I can't imagine the elites of the marquis fall to something like undeads. They've probably been repulsed already, but it'd be a good opportunity to get the right of the marquis' territory depending on the damage."
"Well, everyone, please calm down. Why don't we let him tell us the latest information."

The high class people who have been talking turn toward an old man with good build.
Everyone are seemingly hungry of new informations, the buzz suddenly stops at once.

"Territory of marquis Muno has been defeated by the undeads army."

From that words, the bustling is revived from the silent.

"That can't be."
"They should have golem corps and even magician corps there."
"Moreover, they should had just bought a lot of tigerkin slaves from the weaselkin and made large battalions."

"They should have been one of the strongest five forces in this country."
"What actually happened?"

Their surprises are natural. Marquis Muno holds a very vast territory that produces many gold, silver, and even mithril and magic ores from their leading mines. Backed by that assets and various luxuries that even the king lack, the marquis had amassed armed forces that could even fight against the king's armies.

"We have to wait for more reports to understand what actually happens, we've only received the report that『The marquis capital has fallen』from the the birdkin of duke Oyugock's intelligence unit."

Silence dominates the room, but then the oldest gentleman who holds a cane starts to talk.

"I'm sorry but I have to go see my physician soon. Excuse me for leaving."
"Is that so, it's also the time for me to play with my gradnchildren."
"My chronic pain is aching..."

The older gentlemen are leaving their seats one by one, the only ones who remain in that place is the young gentleman who has brought the news and a middle-aged gentleman. Of course, the two understand that the words of the people who are leaving are just mere excuses.

"Everyone is shrewd for profit huh."
"The kingdom army is most likely going to depart for the extermination of the undeads. Since there are many way to profit from it if the campaign is large-scale, it can't be helped."
"Is it fine for you?"
"Yes, I've already arranged something in the house."
"As expected of the right-hand man of the majesty."
"Your excellency, prying for identity here is"
"Ah right, sorry. I'd like to get my hand on the list of nobles with no legitimate child from you, no, from a certain bureaucrat-dono, would he be willing to help?"
"That's wonderful. Other people's happiness are my happiness. I'd be glad to be the deliveryman."

And then, two months after he brought the informations, the largest gathering of kingdom army ever recorded in history departed to marquis Muno's territory.

◇

"Then, all relatives of marquis Muno have died of unnatural causes?"
"It doesn't end only in that. Earl Bobi that had married with the marquis' little sister and all their children, every one of them die from a drowning accident."
"Is that true? I've also heard that misfortunes have befallen earl Muzuki?"

After the triumphal return of the kingdom army who has gone on campaign to the marquis Muno's territory, the whole family of marquis Muno have died unnaturally, no one remains from either direct or collateral family.

Thereupon, for the sake of succeeding the marquis, it seems that the nobles have sent out the one who have married into the marquis family, but they all die of accidents or mysterious illness, such reports are coming in succession to the royal capital.
Such stories also appears many times among their talks.

"If it's like this, the one who will inherit the territory might be marquis Ashinen or earl Fudai who don't have territory of their own."
"No, the territory of marquis Muno is too wide. It's possible to divide it into 4 or 5 territories."
"Oh dear, right about this time, there should be a lot of nobles who are raising money for the bribes."
"No wonder there are a lot of applicant for loan this month."

And then, half a year after this day, blood relations of marquis Muno up until the seventh degree of kinship have all died out. The rumor among the people is that it's the curse of the undead king.

◇

"Fuh, after marquis Ashinen, even earl Fudai died of unnatural death huh."
"Putting aside earl Fudai who has died of drowning in his house's pond, isn't the marquis Ashinen who has been killed by a spear in the downtown area not an unnatural death?"
"However, the guards who were with him didn't even notice when he was kidnapped in an instant, wasn't he fallen to the hand of the undead king?"
"Oy oy, nobles, of all people, shouldn't believe the irresponsible rumor of the street people."
"Well, even if we put aside the rumor, with this, there have been five influential nobles who would have succeeded Muno's family that dies of unnatural death consecutively."
"How many candidates remain now?"
"There is none. Every one of them has withdrawn."

Everyone, including the one who asked that question, already knew. The atmosphere is full of sarcastic smiles of people with obstructed faces.

"Even though they had bribed, no, spent entertainment expense to the brink of bankruptcy, they withdrew because they got cold feet from the rumor huh."
"No, two people among the five were active labyrinth explorers during their youth. It might be wise for them to withdraw."

Afterwards, a lot of lower honorary nobles full of ambition instigated by their guardian for their own profit also appeared, but the ones who bore the full brunt weren't only the lower nobles, even the guardian nobles died of unnatural death, so the candidates completely dried out.

And then, as the reward for the subjugation of the undead city, the mines of marquis Muno are given to the adjacent lords, starting with duke Oyugock.
Since there are a lot of dissatisfied voices from the knights who have participated in the battle, it's decided that the for the next 10 years, from the yields produced by mines that the

feudal lords have obtained, 20% of it are to be given to the king, and the remaining half are to be shared among the knights.

Due to this, the value of marquis Muno's territory has fallen sharply.
With the profit gone and only risk remain, years where Muno's territory is without a feudal lord keeps piling.

◇

"Everyone, do you know that the feudal lord for the undead city has been decided?"
"Oy oy, you, don't call it undead city."
"That's right, there should be around 20-30 thousands people who live there."
"Oh, I apologize."

The young noble receives a cup of wine from a maid and wets his mouth with it.

"So it should be either the fifth prince or the honorary Earl Toldora, which one is it?"
"Since it'd be bad if a member of royal family death, it would be honorary earl Toldora right?"

The young noble who has started the matter only listens to the talks of the nobles around amusingly without opening his mouth.
Seemingly impatient, a middle-aged noble representing other nobles urges him to continue the story. However, the name that the young noble lets out is unexpected by anyone.

"Do everyone know baronet Donan?"
"Now then, that's an unfamiliar name."
"No, wait, I've heard it somewhere."
"Wasn't he from the branch family of duke Oyugock."
"Ah, that good-natured small man huh. He gave a self-compiled hero's book for the celebration of our seven year olds daughter's birthday."
"Ah, that man who's famous for liking hero huh."
"However, I don't remember him being a brave person who would risk his life by becoming a feudal lord like that?"

Yes, from what they remember, the incompetent man is fit to be called 'forgettable'. He didn't look like a man who had ambition to raise himself at all.

He was a straight harmless man--that's the common view among them.

"That would mean that he was likely recommended by duke Oyugock."
"But, the guardian nobles were dying too. Do you think that cautious duke Oyugock would do such thing?"
"That's right, since the mines have been distributed to the neighboring lords, marquis Muno's territory is only large without any specialized industry from its people, it has been reduced to poverty. There shouldn't be any profit for the excellency duke to be involved now."

It can't be helped that they're puzzled. Excluding the area directly under the king, the duke

holds the largest territory. And it's not just vast, it's also the leading territory that produces things like rice, salt, silk and glasswork. Moreover, he even got himself the mines from marquis Muno territory and the right to deal with the set mines that the dwarves have occupied. No one can think why he would want a territory that's only wide now.

"Actually, about that baronet Donan, he has been living in the city of the marquis Muno territory for the past five years."
"What? Weren't even honorary nobles and lower nobles killed in Muno city?"
"That's right, the only nobles in Muno city now is the associate baron and his family."
"He's bringing his family to such place huh."
"It looks like they're people ignorant of the world."
"Fumu, rather than incompetent, his insensitivity can't be saved."
"Since his wife is a commoner, their noble blood is thin, that might be the reason."

Thus, in the following year, baronet Donan succeeds the Muno title, and becomes a baron inaugurated as the feudal lord.

◇

Let's change the place, to the baron main building inside the castle. 10 years after the inauguration as the baron, it's the mansion that has finally been completed with the assistance of duke Oyugock.

"Then, the marriage for the princess is indeed...
"Yeah, since the ceremony was postponed for many times, I had anticipated it, but a messenger with official refusal notice had come."
"Good grief, how deplorable. If they wanted to refuse, then the fiance-dono should had come himself."

The baron soothes the consul Jii who gets mad for his sake. He lost his anger after the surprising outlet of the anger earlier.

"It can't be helped, Soruna doesn't look to be interested anyway, and even their ages are 10 years apart."
"However, if this keeps up, her marriageable age would pass."

The words is unreserved since they've been together for many years, the baron smiles wryly.

"I don't mind even if it's a person from the street if Soruna has chosen."
"We can't let that happen. As he would inherit this territory, he should not be lower than vassals that have served master for generations. Moreover, it's also important to marry the neighboring lords. You can't be negligent in this matter."

Even while nodding to Jii's words, the baron has halfway given up about the engagements of his daughters. Until the time when he was inaugurated as the feudal lord, there were more than 100 nobles who died while aiming to become this territory's lord. Furthermore, it didn't only befall to the person himself, sometimes even the parents until the grandchildren terribly fell victims.

Even if they are escaping from their own difficulty, there is no guarantee that they would not fall into calamity if they marry the daughter of the cursed territory's lord. There are many nobles who think so.

Even the partner who had declined this time had only become the fiancee because he was promised to become the lord at the beginning. In fact, lady Karina is going to be an adult next year, but she still doesn't have a fiancee even now.

It's five years later that lady Soruna meet her new fiancee, and a year before the worst calamity visit baron Muno's territory.

Intermission: Muno Castle's Servant

"Then there is no objection, we will change to this clothes that Arisa-dono has proposed starting this spring."

After the head maid said so, the 20 maids inside the room cheered in joy at once.
But, that can't be helped I think. It's a brilliantly cute clothes that can't be compared to the dark grey plain work clothes that we have worn until now.

"Umm, head maid."

When I look at the person who's asking, not only me, everyone's faces stiffen.
It's Meeda who's always saying unneeded things at bad times.

"Is there a budget to arrange such expensive looking clothes for everyone's share? If there's an extra budget, then I'd be happier with bonus."

I'd like money too, but there's no way that bonus would come out.
After the head maid glares at Meeda with eyes like ices, she replies seriously.

"There is no extra budget."

What'd you say?!

"Chevalier Satou-sama will bear the expense for the production of one set of maid uniforms including the matching aprons for everyone."

Uhya, if it's for the shares of 20 people, I wonder how many gold coins it'd be?
I've had a guess after seeing Pochi-chan and the other's hairs and equipments, but he's really rich huh. What does he see in this kind of poor noble's place that he'd serve under it?

I guess he's really aiming for Karina-sama's knockers?
Get destroyed you big-breasts lovers.

◇

"What's today's dinner I wonder~."
"Haa, I'm hungry~."

My coworker, Talna, and me enter the dining room. Since the work in the morning got dragged on, our lunches were also delayed.
Usually our meals consist of only boiled potatoes and salted soup, but it can't be helped that we're looking forward to it for the past week.
Pochi-chan and the others said, "Prey nano desu~.", and went on to hunt birds and other beasts. They put professional hunters to shame, but are all demi-humans this amazing?

"Oh, Talna, Erina. You've come at just the right time."

The master of the kitchen, Gelt-obasan, called us.
Oh?! If she's here that would mean that!

"Don't tell me, chevalier-sama is using the kitchen?"
"That's right, looks like he's doing trial and error to make a dish called Karaage or something."

Yes!
Talna's and my eyes meet, savoring in joy.
It's unbearable if we get driven out of the dining room if we make noise here.

"Hey hey, Gelt-san."
"I know, wait a bit more."

So even Gelt-san is also looking forward to it.
When the door opens, chevalier-sama's slave girl is carrying a plate with small dark brown lumps on it. What's this girl's name again? Was it Lili. Her face is a shame, but she's a good girl with no strange behavior.

"Thanks to Gelt-san's advice, it has come out well. Umm, although there are some from chevalier's trial mixed in, if you'd like."
"Yeah, those starving maids over there will take care of it, no problem."
"Yup, yup, if it's chevalier-sama's dish, I'd eat it no matter how much~"
"Yep, yep, I'm envious with you girls who could eat it anytime."

I stab the karaage with a fork and carry it in front of my mouth. It's a bit bold of me since it's the first time I've seen this kind of dish, but if it's chevalier's dish, it must be delicious without doubt.
I put it in my mouth and bite it. Hot. But, it's delicious. It's different than grilled or steamed meat. What's this I wonder, I think the inside is chicken meat, but I'm not sure what's the crispy thing outside. But, it's delicious.

When I'm thinking of eating one more and put the fork on the plate, there's already nothing remaining.

"Erina, you sure can eat well."
"Mou, Erina, I want to eat a bit more too."

Oops, I thought of eating just one more, but I had already finished half of the plate myself.
Lili is giggling. That laughter must be because she's thinking that my way of eating is similar to another person. I've thought so.

◇

"That's why the shortcut to increase the earning is by gathering population!"
"Even if you say that, what should we do about food supply."
"We're back to our talk earlier for that. Let's readjust the land on this uselessly wide city, and put farms inside it like Seryuu city. According to master's survey, it should be possible to

make fields on 70% of the city."

I'm putting tea and tea-cake sweets on a place that doesn't disturb lady Arisa and consul Nina who are engaging in heated discussion.
Still, this girl really doesn't look like a 10 years old.
To talk politics in equal term with Nina-sama, she's surely a genius. Even Nina-sama and Baron-sama call her with [Dono] honorific even though she's chevalier's slave. On top of that, it seems that the prototype for the new maid uniform is made by her, amazing person is amazing in anything. God is unfair.

"How long does that man intend to sleep? Arisa-dono, aren't you working your master too much?"
"No way, we sleep together even today."

Dangerous, I almost made a sound when I put down the cup.
What? That person is sleeping together with this child. To think that his range isn't limited to the beautiful blond wife with big breasts, but also to this small girl. That's unexpected.

◇

"Erina, you're backing away. Talna, don't hold back."

Today, we're training together with new recruits inside the city. Talna and me were originally soldiers, but they were searching for people who could stand up against thieves from the baron's army, so we changed jobs to become maid and guards for the ladies.
I wonder if it's because of that that I don't really feel sad to hear that baron army is almost annihilated. If I didn't change job, I would had become zombie and ended up flattened on the sole of the giants.

"Tou! nano desu."
"Nyu~ naive~?"

In a slightly separate place, Pochi-chan and Tama-chan are having a match with wooden swords.
Pochi-chan's charging speed is amazing, but Tama-chan who could avoid it is also amazing. If it's 1-on-1 Sir Zotor is stronger indeed, but if it's 2-on-1, they'd likely win. Even though they're so cute, as expected of beastkin.

Well, these two are still far.

"Well then, here I go."
"Yosh, come at me anytime."

The scale tribe woman thrusts her spear together with red glow while screaming full of fighting spirit. Sir Zotor wards it off with his shield and the spear slips away.
The scalekin woman seemingly has read that and attacks with the other end of the spear aiming at Sir Zotor's arm, but it's repelled with his sword.
The level of these two's fight is too different I can't make it into reference. Or rather, why

are they using magic weapons during training?

"I've found you! I'll have you fight me today!"

Ah, again.
The way Karina-ojousama expresses her love is really childish.
Chevalier-sama who is cheering for Pochi-chan and the others suffers from the challenge to battle.

Well, those breasts that sway as they pleases are really popular among male soldiers.... Mou, please just fall off.

Karina-sama's movement is different than from the past, it's already not in the realm of human. It looks like it's the effect of an amazing magic tool called artifact or something.

But then, the chevalier who's always able to avoid those attacks, isn't he actually quite amazing?

◇

While being healed from the sound of reed flute from somewhere, I am doing the laundry. I don't know who's playing, but it's a nice melody.

Together with the melody, nice sweet smells arrives.
Kuh, please stop the smell since I'm starving.

When I turned around, there's an elf girl who's holding a reed flute on one hand. She's one of chevalier-sama's mistress if I'm not mistaken. Even though that person looks harmless, he's keeping seven wives and mistress for himself.

Something smells good, it seems that it's drifting from the bread-like thing that this girl is holding on her other hand.

"Drool."

I wipe it while panicking after the elf girl points it out.
I'm sorry~ it's a really delicious smell after all.

While saying "Nn.", the elf girl presents me a thin bread. I don't know what you're saying with those few words. I wonder if all elves are this taciturn?
If she didn't continue with "Mouthful", I wouldn't have understood what she was saying until the end.

I bite the corner of the bread while being careful not to open my mouth too wide.

De-li-sh--!

What's this. It's too delicious. Although the karaage back then were also delicious. I don't understand how should I express this. It's soft and sweet, ah, I'd like to know more

vocabularies. It seems that it's called a crepe.

"Thank you, it's very delicious. It was chevalier-sama who made it right?"
"Nn."

I see, so it's really that person.
Should I seriously try to marry into the rich household? I'm fine with being the eighth.

◇

"Erina, are you free now?"
"Yup, I only have to fold these laundries."
"Then put that aside for now, please get the carriage out."
"Un, it's fine. Which official is going out?"
"It seems that chevalier-sama has some businesses in the city."

Ooh, this is a favor from heaven!

"Leave it to me, I'll have the carriage ready at the entrance quick."
"Please do."

I was naive.

He's going to be with his wife when he's going out alright. Satou-sama is not alone, he's together with Nana-sama, the wife.
Unfortunately, the plan to marry into the rich doesn't seem to be able to be realized soon.

Intermission: Dream of Summer Day

That is dream, things that happened a long time ago, dream of distant day.

◇

"You too, let's go play together."

I was interested with a girl of the same age who was looking bashfully from behind the offering box of the shrine, so I gathered my courage and invited that girl to play.

"My name is Ichirou. How about you?"

"I am •••"

"Hee~, the name really sounds like a shrine girl."

I lead the girl by hands, taking her to the shrine ground where my cousins are playing. At first she was quiet, but after we began playing song and hide-and-seek, she lets out bright smile that wouldn't lose to her beautiful red hair while laughing.

Fun time quickly passes. The sun is already hidden between the mountains.

"Everyone, let's go home soon. You too, •••, let's go home together until the halfway."

"My house is here."

The girl said so while going back to the shrine.

I had certainly heard the girl's name, but I couldn't remember it no matter what.

◇

"Right at that time, the prince appears, and defeat the bad dragon with one swing of his sword."

"I don't like that story."

Looks like she didn't like the picture book that I tried hard to read.

The girl who sulks a bit plays with her with reddish-orange hair while pouting.

"This shrine is dedicated for a dragon god. Her name is Mizuhana-hime."

The girl sticks out her chests while looking proud.

This shrine worships a god called Ama-no-Mizuhana-hime.

"Then, then. Mizuhana-hime crossed the rainbow and came here. She was angry at a young man of the village who went to see her dancing on top of the mountain of this shrine."

"Why was she angry?"

The girl pouts because she can't remember it.

"Uu~ dunno. She was angry surely because it was not good! Don't look at the practice she said."

"She's shy huh."

"Yes, she must be!"

The girl who awkwardly folds her slender arms is nodding as if convinced by her own story.

"And then! The angry goddess-sama turned into a dragon and flew to the sky, bringing rain that continued for three days and night."

"Eeh~, wouldn't it just fine to forgive him just by poking his forehead."

"Uu~ it's alright! Because this is a legend!"

Seems that excessive retort is forbidden.

"The young man who saw the dancing on top of this mountain desperately apologized to the goddess. And then, the goddess forgave and married the young man."

I don't understand it.

What? that rapid development. The story must've been shortened huh.

◇

Inside the shrine's office, we're eating watermelons while listening to the cicada's sound until our ears hurt. Eating energetically to the point that it ruins her face which is slightly older than me, she bites the watermelon and spouts out the seeds.

"Hey, you're a girl, so get it in your hands and put it back on the plate."

"Ichirou is stupid! It's more delicious to eat watermelons like this! Only children like us are allowed to do this. Stop saying those garish words."

She overreacts while messing with the green hair that has the same color as watermelons on her shoulders.

The girl is always energetic.

◇

Night at the shrine ground, we're enjoying fireworks while being accompanied with the smell of mosquito repellent.

I throb when I see the girl who wears yukata looking like an adult with her light violet hair knitted and put on the nape of her neck, making her looks amorous.

"Do you know Ichirou-kun. The deity enshrined in this shrine, Ama-no-Mizuhana-hime. She married a young man a long time ago. However, since he was a human, he passed away before long. When he was dying Mizuhana-hime promised him.『When you're reincarnated someday I will come back to your side』, she said, isn't it romantic?"

The girl whispers as if enraptured while looking at me in sitting position.

I throb looking at the girl who's far older than me showing a mischievous child-like smile.

"Does something like reincarnation even happen?"

"It does."

The girl firmly affirmed so, replying my question.

"But, it's no good if he's just reincarnated. The life span of gods are different than people. They'd be separated again."

"Isn't it fine if she just makes the person she likes become a god?"

"Even gods aren't almighty enough to grant divinity as they like."

Her words are unusually passionate for the cool her.

"It's not enough with the soul of a single person, it'd need a lot more."

I'm a bit scared with those words.

◇

I'm bringing the dog called Satou that grandpa keeps as a pet while climbing the stairs to the shrine ground.

It's a dog with strange name. Seemed that the person who gave the dog to grandpa is called Satou-san. It's really like my family to give the dog name like that.

I pass through the shrine gate with no red stone and enter the shrine ground.

"Ou! Been waiting, Satou."

"I've said to call me Ichirou when it's not in the game."

"Fufun, I was calling the dog."

"Is that right, then let's not do the game today and play outside with the dog."

When I tease the girl, her bossy attitude breaks apart and she gets flustered.

"W, wait, if we're not there, who would save Trojan Union from Akaia Empire."

"Okay okay, let's look for a shade for the place to play."

We sit in line on the shrine's open veranda with a nice shade at the shrine ground. Satou the dog that got his leash unfastened is running around the shrine ground without losing to the summer's heat.

I take out two portable consoles from my bag--I pass one of the Jiopoke to the girl.

The girl loves to hear the clicky sounds from when the buttons are moved. She always have fun by clicking it with her small fingers before the power is turned on. We connect the two game consoles with link cable and turn on the power.

"Oh, it begins."

The game is a space war simulation game with Trojan War as the motif.

Despite being a product for children, it has the concept of searching for enemies and supply replenishment.

"Muu, another surprise attack from outside the range of enemy search. That's why you're Satou nanoja."

<TLN: She refers herself with "warawa" and almost always ends her sentences with "Ja".>

She said something really unreasonable.

"Then, I'll let you use『Map Exploration』once on the next map as handicap."

"Yay, nanoja. Might as well let me use『Meteor Bullets』then."

"Eeh,『Meteor Bullets』is forbidden. The situation would get reversed instantly."

"That's the good part! Just once. Kay? It's fine with using it once~ I want to use it."

I eventually give up to the girl who pleas until her indigo hair got disheveled. Even the lord of the manor can't win against crying child they say. I don't know what lord of manor though.

"Fuhahaha, take this nanoja."

The girl happily use『Meteor Bullets』and annihilate my main force.

And then, her face looks overjoyed when she captures my main battleship who has lost all its forces.

"Aah,『Meteor Bullets』is satisfying. Thanks to it, I even get myself the battleship as a souvenir."

The girl is in high spirit, but when she takes the battleship to her field, it changes into shock.

This game takes after Trojan War as motif. Of course, that includes the [Trojan Horse] tactic.

"Uwah, robots are coming out of the battleship. Ah, even though that carrier has just been completed. No don't, don't attack that factory, no~~~."

After the robots destroyed the supply equipments inside her army, my main force that I had hidden attacked. Although it's close, it's somehow my win in the end.

"Uu, you're cruel. You don't hold back against a small girl."

"Look, isn't it rude to not fight with all my might in a battle."

"Fuhn nanoja, I hate Satou. I'll put a curse so you'll always be with flat-chests for all your life."

That's a harsh curse even for a joke. Kyonyuu idol is the most popular girl in my class.

Let's take out another game here and change the conversation.

"Yes, yes, shall we play different game next?"

"What kind?"

"This is called RPG, it's a game that have you start weak, let you get stronger by defeating small fries, and defeat the demon lord in the end."

It's a blunt description if I do say so myself.

"Ooh, defeating demon lord huh! That's great!　By the way, can we defeat demon gods?"

"There are various types of hidden boss in this game, and since there are gods and demon gods too if I'm not mistaken, we should be able to."

"That's good! Okay, let's do it Satou!　Quickly start it!"

Her tension is always high, but today it's unshakable. I keep the girl company playing game until nightfall that day.

Play game only one hour a day, you could not possibly do that right.

◇

The girl is reading a thick book on the bank of the small fountain at the corner of the shrine

ground.

"Good morning, what are you reading today?"

"Umu, there was this [God is Dead] writing when I was half asleep so it perked up my interest."

"Heeh, can gods die?"

"Umu, they can. However, it's just dying. If you leave them alone they will get revived. Since gods are undying."

<TLN: Same kanji as Satou's immortal/undying.>

"Can you say that as dying? What are other state of deaths?"

"Well, they do die physically. Once they die, gods become spirit bodies, they prepare their own soul, make new body, and complete the revival. Although if it's high-ranking gods, then they don't need go through such annoying procedure. Even if they die, they would get instantly revived since they're universally recognized in the world."

There, the girl laughs, 'kufufu'.

"It's just like you."

My eyes become round toward that unexpected words.

"Yes, you are Ichirou no matter what the era or the worlds. Omnipresence as if exceeding the space-time, no matter how different I am, we always get in contact and become friend."

Before I could hear the meaning of her words, the voice of her mother calling her can be heard.

"Fumu, it's time."

The girl's mysterious blue hair turns black as if it's dripping ink.

It looks like I'm the only one who see her hair in different color.

And then, the girl with black hair talks to me politely as if she's stranger like usual.

"Hey, Suzuki-kun. If it's fine with you, would you see my Kagura dance?"

Kagura dance? Ah, Kagura dance huh.

She bashfully pulls the edge of my shirt, and I, who's charmed by her shy smile, follow her to the stage inside the shrine.

The girl changes her clothes to shrine maiden attire and begins to dance on the stage.

"Hikaru's dance is getting better right?"

"Yes, she looks like a professional Shrine maiden-san."

"Ufufu, it may not be a job since she's not getting money, but that girl is a genuine shrine maiden. The dance is for the sake of descending god to the body. Look well and burn it to your memory, Satou. It will be useful for you someday."

The one who sits beside me who is concentrating in watching the dance; I don't know if it's the girl's mother, or if it's something else.

Rather than listening to such enigmatic words, I watch the dance of my childhood friend with my whole body.

◇

I was watching my dream from bird's eye perspectives.

Even though I can't remember her name anymore, my childhood friend should have had black hair. Her age should be the same as me too.

My past memory must be mixed with the galge that had shrine stages I made myself during the college year. It's normal in a game to have characters with such colorful hairs.

However, I wonder what's with the line that has nothing to do with games?

『Forget it Ichirou, until the time it's needed. Put memories about us deep inside your heart.』

Overlapping voices of many girls whispered to me.

My consciousness sinks into deep sleep hearing those nostalgic voices.

Intermission: Satou's House Name

"House name is it?"

I was called to Nina-san's office to have me decide the house name for myself as I had been granted honorary knight.

"Isn't honorary noble title only applied for one generation? Is house name necessary?"

"Yes, it's certainly only for one generation, but there are surprising amount of honorary noble house which continue to produce more honorary nobles successively."

"Even though honorary nobles are only limited for one generation, most of them are wealthier than fallen nobles or poor nobles. They could pay for education of their children, and depending on the territory, one could buy titles with money."

Arisa who always hang around Nina-san's room during the day joins the conversation between her documents work.

"It is like that. If it continues for 10 generations, then your house would be bestowed normal chevalier or baronet title."

That's long.

"It's impossible to decide immediately right? We'll do it in 2-3 days, so decide carefully during that time."

"I recommend Tachibana."

If I'm not mistaken, the family name of Arisa past life is Tachibana.

"I'll refrain from that."

"Right, I believe there's already a chevalier called Tachibana. Please check if a name is usable for your house name or not on Yuyurina the civil official. She's more knowledgeable about it than me since she's studied them in royal capital."

"I understand, if I get the candidates to some extents, I'll check on her."

I've talked to Yuyurina-san several times before, she's a calm and taciturn official with brown braided hair. I was vigilant since she was flat, but fortunately the flag wasn't raised.

Since I catch the sight of lady Karina walking on the corridor toward here, I say my farewell to Nina-san and proceed to leave the room.

"Satou-dono, I understand that you're running away from lady Karina, but you're still a noble even at the furthest end. Stop going out from the balcony."

"I'm sorry, Nina-sama. Please overlook it."

I jump off the balcony of Nina-san's office located on the third floor.

In exchange, I hear the voice of Nina-san getting angry at lady Karina who has just gotten there. She came in without knocking again huh. What an obstinate person.

◇

Well then, house name huh. The proper one would be Suzuki, and I would also change my name to Ichirou Suzuki. However, that would be the same as declaring myself as a Japanese, and it's probably safer to not do that.

If I'm to take one from my titles, if it's god slayer, then how about [Kamisaki], or [Kanzaki]?

Satou Kanzaki

It's not bad, but it'll be hard to answer Arisa if she asks about the origin of the name.

Then, from dragon slayer, let's try to take [Ryu] word, or Dragon if it's in western style shall we?

Satou Ryu

Satou Ryuzaki

Satou Dragon

Satou Dragonslayer

Satou Slayer

Not quite there.

I've thought of using hero's name from games, but since there are people who would understand where the inspiration comes from, like Arisa or that Saga empire's hero, it's difficult.

How about using holy swords' names?

Satou Excalibur

Satou Caliburn

Satou Durandal

Satou Longinus

Something's not right.

What about the name from Japanese katana.

Satou Kotetsu

Satou Muramasa

Satou Kikuichimonji

They don't sounds right. Or rather it feels like combining modern world with period drama... those are rejected.

Hah, maybe Satou Satou is good enough~

Not good, I've hit the roadblock.

If this continues, I'll come up with a weird name. I'll go and consult this with other people to change the mood.

◇

"Fa-me~?"

"Turtles are delicious nodesu!"[1]

I asked Pochi and Tama since they were the closest from where I was, but they didn't even understand the meaning of [House Name].

The two are sitting beside lady Soruna while eating rice crackers shaped like bones. Recently, beside the time when they're training, they're always getting snacks from either lady Soruna in the baron living room, or the maid-san in the waiting room. You'll get fat you know?

"House name is it? Alright then, it's fine to use Donan name if you marry Karina."

Lady Soruna said so mischievously. Looks like that name is the one baron-san has used before succeeding Muno name.

Satou Donan.

It's not bad, but if it comes with lady Karina, I'll pass.

If she gets a bit calmer, I feel like she could become a friend, but right now she's an acquaintance at best. Of course, I won't say something impossible like her becoming ladylike.

"I will refrain since that sounds dreadful."

"Oh my, Karina's future is rocky huh."

I get out of the room while the lady is giggling.

◇

"I recommend Nagasaki. It was the name of my previous master."

"How about Kishreshgalza? It is the name of my family, there shouldn't be anyone who call themselves so."

"Bornean."

Those are remarks from Nana, Liza and Mia in turns.

Satou Nagasaki.

Satou Kishreshgalza.

Satou Bornean.

Nope.

Or rather, Liza, and Mia, aren't those your family names?

"What are you guys talking about?"

Lulu who has just come back to the room greets. Her eyes are shining when she hears about the decision of my house name.

"Oh my! House name is it! How about Kubooku?"

I believe Kubooku is the name of Arisa's and Lulu's kingdom.

"As expected, it'll be bad if I use Kubooku. It'll look like I'm picking a fight with the country that has invaded Kubooku."

"Then.... Ah, no, it's nothing."

Lulu who seemed to have thought of something stopped halfway. When I urge her to tell me, the name [Watari] comes out.

"It was the family name of my grandmother. She was from far away country, but the country where I was born forbade anyone besides nobles to have family name, so it wasn't used by anyone."

Satou Watari.

That sounds like Satori.

When I tell Lulu that I'll put it to candidate list, the other three are booing, so I also put the names from the three to the list. Liza wasn't saying any complaint, but I could feel it from

her atmosphere.

◇

"How about asking Yuyurina-dono? She should know many kinds extinct house names y'know?"

I asked knight Zotor and retainer Hauto, and although there weren't any good name that came out, I was told about a person that I could rely instead.

I check on the map and head toward where lady Yuyurina is.

She's in the dining room.

"Haus? Hausnemisit?"

"I'm sorry to disturb you during your meal."

"That's right chevalier-sama. In the first place, servant's dining room isn't somewhere you should often step your foot into."

I called out Yuyurina-san who had stuffed her mouth full like a hamster, but I was immediately scolded by the head-maid who was nearby.

Head-maid-san said that if a noble came close to servants' area, they would get nervous and wouldn't be able to get works done. I don't understand nobles. If it's a company, won't the executives use staff canteen?

"I-have-found-you."

Haah, someone's troublesome has come. I've thought that she would come a bit later, but it seems she's taken a shortcut. I had noticed her, but I wasn't able to run away since I was being lectured by head-maid-san.

"Now! Let's have a match like usual desuwa! I'll get a hit on you today!"

Lady Karina takes a stance while declaring so.

She's getting pretty good in this one week. Maybe due to the grappling experience with me, she's acquired [Fighting] skill level 1.

Of course, we haven't ever actually fight during all this time.

"Karina-sama! Please consider the place!"

Head-maid-san thundered off. Lady Karina, you should have been more aware of your surrounding. She's a relative of Toruma (Ossan) in that regard.

In the end, I'm not able to use names from extinct nobles from what I've heard from

Yuyurina-san. It looks like I need permission from Crest Parliament on the Royal Capital to use them.

◇

"So, have you decided?"

"I've not found a good one."

"Well, it is something that will follow you for the rest of your life. One can't decide on it so fast huh."

I haven't decided on the house name after the promised three days. There are Yuyurina-san who has come to deliver some documents to Arisa, and somehow, lady Karina in Nina-san's room.

"What~? You're puzzling over house name? Then, I have a good one in mind."

"What kind of name is it?"

"Hmm~ what-should-I-do-I-wonder."

Lady Karina is being pretentious. Annoying.

"Nina-san, I'm sorry, but please wait for some days more."

"It can't be helped huh."

"Then, if you haven't decided after two more days, it's Tachibana, alright."

Arisa, you really want to make my family name Tachibana huh?

"Wait~ please don't ignore me?"

"I'm sorry, I've forgotten."

She's not easily discouraged huh.

"How about Pendragon? It's the name of hero-sama. Orion Pendragon-sama."

"Isn't that a fictional character?"

"That's right. He's the hero from the story I love. It's a heroic story about a hero who went on a journey riding on a dragon, surpassed seven trials of the gods, and finally beat the demon lord."

The story of king Arthur mixed with Greek myth.

"He's riding a dragon is he."

"Yes, and it's not a Wyvern, but a Welsh dragon."

I think the father of king Arthur is Pendragon. Was he a hero who had slain a dragon?

It may be unexpectedly good. I have Excalibur anyway, I might even change my name to Arthur, like Arthur Pendragon.

Afterwards, I was really troubled with the house name matter for two days straight.

◇

"Then, let's begin. ■■ Name Order.『Satou Pendragon』."

>[Name Order Skill Acquired]

I got a new name and name order skill from Yuyurina-san.

After that, I confirm on the Yamato Stone, and a new ID is prepared for me. Unlike the one for commoner, it's a silver plate with the letters engraved. I'm told that I need to have it casted with fixture magic in duke's territory later.

This time, I had changed the value on companion column before I touched Yamato Stone.

I increased my level and skills as to make it looked like I could support from behind, even if a bit unreliably and moved a bit fast. I've consulted Arisa about this on the day before.

"Fufufu, Karina Pendragon doesn't sound so bad."

I've heard dangerous remark, but let's ignore it.

"Arisa Pendragon sounds like Arthur, but the nuance is good."

Arisa is grinning, making her mouth looks like a wave.

"Ehehehe~ it'd be nice if I get to be called Lulu Pendragon someday."

Lulu, even you huh.

Of course, Lulu were only speaking to herself. If I didn't have [Straining Ears] skill I wouldn't hear it.

"Pochi Pendragon nanodesu."

"Tama Pendragon~?"

Pochi and Tama are congratulating while running around me.

"Mwuu, Bornean."

"Master, you're splendid."

"Master. Master Pendragon. Which one should I use to call you?"

Mia doesn't seem like she's given up yet. Beside her, Liza is saying something like a guardian would.

I answer, "Just master is fine.", to Nana's question.

"Then, chevalier Satou Pendragon, please take care of me from now on."

"Yes, viscount Nina Rottol."

Nina-san offers her hand, and we shake hands. This is the first time I know that there's a custom for handshakes in this world.

While gripping my hand, Nina-san gives me further homework.

"Next, you have to decide on your crest before you depart."

It's crest this time huh...

On the following day, I take lessons for socializing with high-class people from the baron and butlers, and heraldry from Yuyurina-san.

It goes without saying that I've gotten [Social] and [Heraldry] skills during those times.

Name: Satou Pendragon

Tribe: Human

Level: 30

Affiliation: Territory of Baron Muno of Shiga Kingdom

Occupation: None

Rank: Chevalier

Title: None

Skill:

[Magic Art]

[Evasion]

[Training]

[Blacksmith]

[Woodcraft]

[Cooking]

[Arithmetic]

[Estimation]

[Social]

[Heraldry]

Reward and Punishment:

[Medal of Sapphire of Baron Muno Territory]

[First Rank of Baron Muno Army]

[Medal of Honor of Muno Citizens]

I've set these parameters on my companion column.

They're abnormally higher than the one on the ID from Seryuu city, but since I have not shown it when I go inside Muno city, it's probably fine.

I make it level 30; being higher than average so I won't be make light of and yet not so high as to be feared.

Since I've been seen doing blacksmithing and woodworking in the wagon, I've added them so it wouldn't look strange.

I've also added cooking since the servants have seen me made various things.

Social and Heraldry are noble-like, so I've added them.

The two medals from baron territory seem to be justified for saving the territory. Seems that either of the medals are only given for someone who has done outstanding things.

The last medal is given to me by the influential people from the city.

House name=kamei, turtles=kame.

Intermission: Muno Lord's Secret

"Baronet Leon Donan, over here."

"Yes."

At the center of the chapel near the royal castle that his majesty has lead me to, there's a crystal-like thing with 20 sides shining blue light while floating.

His majesty is waiting in front of that floating crystal.

"Leon, this is a City Core."

--City Core?

I stare at the City Core as if I'm charmed.

"This is the reason that makes a king and governing lords different than other nobles."

"...Reason, is it?"

His majesty solemnly nods at my parroting words of question.

"That's right. The City Core draws abundant magical power from The Source, it's an artifact that exist for the purpose of letting the person who becomes its master to make use of that vast magic power."

As if answering to his majesty's voice, the City Core flashes blue light once.

"Even if it's said that this City Core is an artifact, it's unknown if the core is made by someone somewhere. There was a certain king who once asked the gods, but the answer never came."

"Then, just who is..."

"I don't know. At the very least, the method to create one is already lost at the present time. Once, the Bornean sage, Trazayuya-dono, attempted to recreate one, but he could only make a counterfeit with much lower performance at best."

I wait for his majesty to continue his words.

I wonder what's the real intention of his majesty for showing me this artifact?

"The story has diverted, I'm sorry."

"No, I've heard some really interesting things."

"Although it goes without saying that this talk is a secret to anyone but the one who will

succeed royalty's or lords' house. Revealing this to others is useless."

"--I understand."

Unpleasant sweats flow on my back.

Why would his majesty tell me such secret?

Even though I'm a relative of duke Oyugock, I'm not of the main family, and nothing more than a baronet.

Just what is the king--

"Now then, let's get back to the topic. The lord could establish this City Core to people so they could use it and uses ritual magic. Truly various magic; you could create walls that could defend against attack from high-ranking demon, attack magic that reduce armies to ashes, or climate magic that could manipulate weather."

Even manipulating weather!

Handling enormous amount of magic power from The Source, it could even resist high-ranking demon that could equal sub-gods.

"That is like--"

I hesitate to continue the words on the verge of my mouth.

Since the words are like sacrilege against gods.

"Like a living god is it?"

However, his majesty continued to speak those words lightly.

"There is no need to worry. Gods will not needlessly interfere kings or lords. It has been decided with the covenant between the gods and the ancient kings."

The king said so, but there was a large country comparable to the the old empire that got destroyed after angering gods.

Shouldn't we be careful not to let out many sacrilegious words?

Though a coward like me isn't able to remonstrate the king.

"The story keeps wandering off. The lord is special precisely because they could wield the core power to transcend human."

His majesty repeat the story once again as if emphasizing it.

"The rank of the governing lords depend on the scale of The Source they control. Once, a

lord raised his rank followed by numerous cities he had."

His majesty stops talking and judge my reaction.

I timidly nods at his majesty to show my understanding.

"And then a king is a person who's followed by his lords. And then, an emperor is a person followed by kings."

The difference between king and emperor is like that... I've thought that it's just a difference in naming.

I express a question that has crossed my mind to his majesty.

"Then, are guards and viceroy lords too?"

"No. They're both representatives that lords have given authority to act on their behalves. They could borrow the power of the City Core, but the master is still the lord."

--I see.

With this I think I understand the reason why rebellion that guards and viceroy have caused in the history is suppressed.

The reason why the rebellion have been able to be quenched isn't written in the history, but after seeing this, I finally can understand.

"Also, as the holder of City Core, you can appoint new nobles in behalf of the king."

So that's the reason why marquis Lloyd isn't able to appoint chevaliers.

I've always thought it's strange that a high-ranking noble couldn't appoint new nobles when earls of neighboring country could, but I understand now.

"[Nobles] are originally what people who control cities are called. The rank of nobles is indication of the level of authority a representative had. The one protecting the city is either baronet or a baron, the city's viceroy must be a viscount at least, those aren't just customs but in accordance to the authority level of the City Core."

I desperately try to understand his majesty talks, but it's too difficult to understand it all at once.

"Oy oy, you should understand this."

Ashamed with myself, I'm going to apologize to his majesty, but when I hear the majesty's next words, I get so dumbfounded, nothing is coming out of my mouth.

"Leon, today I will grant you Muno house name. Go to Muno city, release the cursed and blocked City Core, and become the new lord."

--Muno?

The same territory where nobles who've announced their candidacy to become its governing lords die one by one, becoming the lord of the [Cursed Territory]?

However, this is a royal order. I do not have the right to refuse.

The majesty has talked about the City Core earlier probably because he has maximum faith in me.

Right now, the thing I can do is to solemnly lower my head and answer, [Your will].

◇

"Are you nervous?"

An old lady with miko outfit looks at me worryingly.

"No, head miko-sama. I, I am okay."

"You don't have to force yourself. Even for me who has long life of confronting monsters, standing in front of this door is making me trembling."

She probably said that to reassure me.

Latenion head miko lets out a young smile belying her age.

I take a deep breath, and together with the head miko, go toward the underground sanctuary on the Muno city where the City Core is.

The people who descend the spiral stairs to the underground sanctuary are only the head miko and me.

Originally, this passage is only to be used by the lord, but for the sake of exorcising the curse that the [Undead King] has left, I'm accompanied by the head miko this time.

I feel more sick each time I step down the stair.

It seems that many nobles die the moment they step on this stair.

It's probably safe this time because I'm with a head miko who holds the title [Saintess].

I continue following head miko while feeling nauseous.

In front of the sanctuary, the head miko touch the walls as if falling.

"Leon, looks like it's the limit soon."

"I understand. I'm going to go alone from here..."

I step into the sanctuary while holding my consciousness.

--My vision is shaking.

Bam, I hear the sound of my own body that has collapsed as if it's coming from other's, I look up.

A semi-transparent black shadow is floating in front of my eyes.

『O intruder. I am [Undead King] Zen--Its shadow. O pure person, show me that you deserve to become the lord.』

"Lord is--"

I faint in the middle of my words, and I get rescued by the golems controlled by royal court magicians that his majesty has deployed.

I tried challenging it for three times after this, but it was over right whenever I had just arrived to the sanctuary.

I wasn't able to grasp the City Core, but for my accomplishment of getting to the sanctuary, I was appointed to be the lord of this land.

Since I'm just a temporary lord, I am not able to tap the magic power of The Source to manipulate weather, resulting in famines often happening in the territory, and I'm not able to stop people from leaving this territory.

I was only able to become the true lord after 16 years.

I had to wait until a merchant who had just become an adult uncovered the plot of the demon by himself, and even saved the territory from the swarms of undead monsters.

◇

I want to grant honorary knight to Satou-kun for his achievements, but since I don't have the City Core, I don't have any way to confer peerage to him.

I could ask Nina-dono to write a letter of recommendation for duke Oyugock, but I'd like to reward him with my own hands.

I proceed to the sanctuary where the City Core sleeps after 16 years, and over there I notice that the curse that has always been there is gone.

I don't know if the caster has died, or if the silver masked hero who defeats the demon has dissolved it.

I walk to the front of the City Core, and a voice that's neither man or woman greets me.

『Welcome, qualified person. Do you hope to become the lord of this land?』

This is probably words from the will of the City Core itself.

I answer clearly.

「I do.」

『The registration is complete. I serve lord Leon Muno from now on』

Lights separate from the City Core, one becomes a ring on my finger, the other flies beneath me.

When I concentrate on the ring that I've received, things that could be done with City Core come into my mind. Apparently, the demon wanted to do something by stealing the magic power from The Source. For the time being, I do ritual magic for controlling weather, I should be able to grant him rank too.

"■■■■ Weather Control. Warming."

『Executing Command. The average temperature of the territory will raise by 15°C for the next few days.』

I don't know how much 15°C is, but if I could decrease the freezing cold, the people who die from it would probably decrease too.

Either way, there's not enough magic power for anything more than this.

On the next morning, I do the ritual of conferring peerage using the City Core without any problem.

I go to the balcony in the early morning, and is surprised at the warmth.

Usually, my breath would becomes white. The cold of midwinter has changed into the warmth of autumn in just one night.

I'm trembling under the sunlight warm.

--It's excessively powerful.

The City Core brings power beyond human to a person.

I vow to use this power for the sake of people without drowning on it.

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デスマーチからはじまる
異世界狂想曲
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